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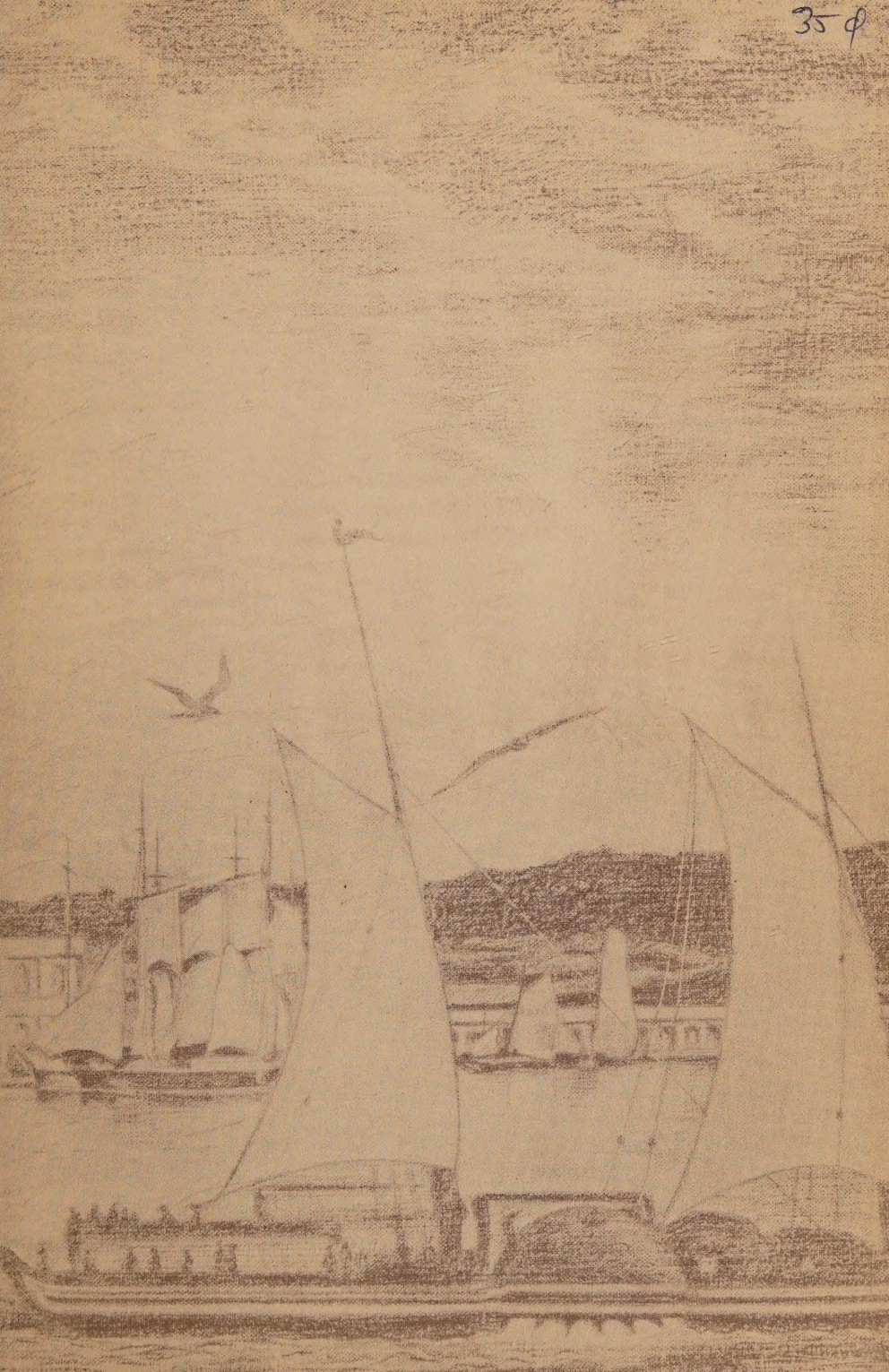

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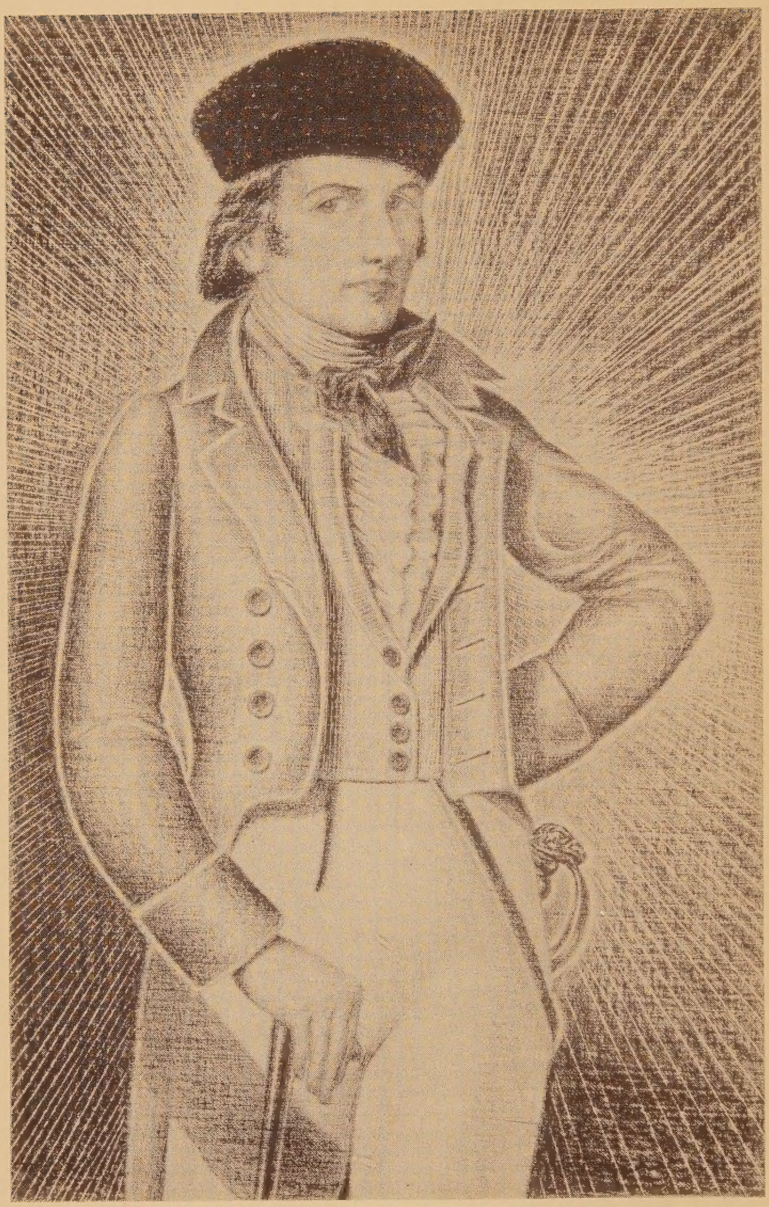

Jean Lafitte

GENTLEMAN SMUGGLER

by

MITCHELL V. CHARNLEY

ILLUSTRATED BY JAY VAN EVEREN

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Jean Lafitte

CHAPTER I

THE SMITHY IN SAINT PHILIP STREET

It called itself a blacksmith shop. But the knowing ones in young New Orleans winked and shrugged their shoulders.

"Who ever saw Jean Lafitte soil his fine fingers at the forge?" they scoffed. "Who ever heard of that Pierre straining his big shoulders to pull at the bellows?"

True, it appeared to be a blacksmith shop. Like its neighbors in Saint Philip Street and around the corner in Bourbon Street, it was a low little building, its wide doors opening squarely onto the flagged stone sidewalks. And inside blacksmiths worked. Hammers clanked on anvils; a forge belched black smoke as the bellows breathed its coals into red-white life. A vat of water hissed and sputtered as glowing metal was plunged into it to cool and shrink.

But the brothers Lafitte, the older Pierre and the younger Jean, were not workmen in their own shop. Their smiths were husky blacks—slaves whose big chests and shoulders glistened with sweat as they forged shoes for horses or chains for other slaves, who sang monotonous tunes as they worked.

And the knowing ones winked. "Yes—you can get your mare shod there if you insist. But do you think Jean Lafitte wears fine clothes because he owns a blacksmith shop? Do you think these wealthy plantation owners come so far to New Orleans to discuss with Pierre the making of a coach tire?"

And again: "Have you not noticed how frequently those workmen come, and stay a while, and disappear?"

That was 1808. For some two years now New Orleans, budding metropolis of the South—United States' newest

great city, for it was only five years since the Louisiana Purchase—had been aware of the brothers Lafitte. From some place they had appeared—exactly whence nobody knew. They were French—that much was sure. They knew a good deal of the sea—Pierre had been in the French navy, rumor said, and Jean was believed to have been a privateer.

But New Orleans did not demand much knowledge about its citizens. New Orleans was a mixed-up kind of city. At first it had been French, when the Sire de Bienville had founded it in 1718. Then had come Spanish government in 1769, and with the Spaniards came the mixture of French and Spanish blood that made the city neither the one nor the other, but Creole instead.

And then the Napoleonic star had risen in Europe. Spain had had to cede Louisiana back to France, and in three years Napoleon's counselors had sold the great territory to the United States. So in 1803 New Orleans had become American in name, if still Creole in nature. But the arrival of the young Virginian, W. C. C. Claiborne, as governor could not make an American city of it. Instead, the infant Stars and Stripes merely brought more elements to mingle with the already jumbled racial strains.

So the New Orleans that received the Lafittes was too

well accustomed to strange faces and new names to bother with inquiring into their past. It felt in its veins the quick blood of growing power. It had seen the French-Canadians—the Acadians whom Louisiana quickly learned to call the "Cajuns"—come from far-north Nova Scotia and go on to the west. It had begun to receive the "free men of color" from Santo Domingo, Negroes fleeing the riots in the West Indies.

A hundred miles up the Mississippi from the Gulf of Mexico, it was nevertheless becoming a great seaport. It was already the Gulf's leading trading center. Its high levees were lined with ships from every side of the world, bringing silks and spices and a thousand commodities to trade for the cotton that was already making men wealthy in the territory. From Havana and from Naples, from India and from New York came these ships; and each bore not only a cargo in its hold but passengers on its deck, come to make their homes in this new Promised Land.

Such a city had neither the time nor the interest to question the Lafittes. The bulky, light-haired Pierre, cross-eyed, quiet, and minding his own affairs, and his slim dark brother Jean stepped calmly off a sailing ship onto the levee one day, occupied the little cottage at the corner of Bourbon and Saint Philip Streets, opened their

"blacksmith shop" nearby, and quickly became accepted members of New Orleans's business community.

Pierre and Jean were not men to talk much of themselves. They frequented the Absinthe Bar and Maspero's Exchange, there to chat with other French and Spanish and American merchants over their coffee and liqueurs. They had business dealings with masters of ships that came into port; they sometimes were quietly if not secretly absent from the city for a few days. They met, too, with plantation owners who came to New Orleans from the rich cotton country up the Mississippi toward Baton Rouge, but their New Orleans friends remained discreetly uncurious about these meetings.

So, by 1808—perhaps two years after their arrival in New Orleans—the Lafittes had become accepted figures in the city. Their "blacksmith shop" was no more a curiosity than was the new sawmill, with its two horse-turned saws. They were known at the two banks; they appeared at the coffee houses and in the city's chief square, the Place d'Armes, as casually as did the slave women with their huge bundles on their heads. They strolled along the levee where Negro stevedores strained and tugged at cotton bales; they listened appreciatively to the plaintive rhythm of the "pressing songs" of the slaves at the cotton presses. They attended the theater

and went to mass at St. Louis Cathedral, on the Place d'Armes. They watched the children playing at the wooden horse riding circus—a kind of primitive merry-go-round.

Jean and Pierre Lafitte, by 1808, were an everyday part of New Orleans' everyday life, even though their smithy was obviously no more than a screen for activities they had not yet brought into the open.

And they were ready to be more candid about these activities. They talked it over as they sat leisurely over their coffee in the patio behind their little cottage. The green fans of a big palmetto waved in the lamp light. Pierre, a thickset man whose white teeth contrasted with his olive skin and dark eyes, sat with his coffee cup in his hand, looking soberly at his younger brother. Jean, now twenty-eight years old, lounged back in his chair, puffing comfortably at a fine Havana cigar. His hands were long and slender, almost effeminate; his limbs were slim, too, and his feet small. As he spoke, his left eyelid fell in a characteristic kind of wink.

"The merchants like to buy from shops in Royal Street," he said thoughtfully. "A Royal Street shop has more tone than a mere forge——"

"The forge has done very well for us," reminded Pierre cautiously.

"Yes—for the start. But I think that, before long, we should open a finer place."

Pierre was still doubtful. "The authorities——"

But Jean smiled. Again that eyelid closed, seeming to add a touch of humor to his remark.

"*Mon dieu*, the authorities! Can you think they would bother to interfere?"

CHAPTER II

MAN OF MYSTERY

JEAN LAFITTE told little enough about himself. But others told many, many tales about him.

For this tall Frenchman was the kind of man that people talk about. He was mysterious. He spoke French and Spanish fluently and English nearly as well; he was known as a reader and keen critic of the books of the day. Yet no one could say exactly what his schooling had been, where his tastes had been cultivated. He had the typical Frenchman's love for fine foods and old wines, he dressed elegantly if quietly, he was a master of the delicate art of dueling. Yet the only background he told about was a background of hardship and adventure, one that would have been more understandable in a hard-handed sea captain than in a carefully groomed, soft-spoken gentleman.

He had, in fact, some of the qualities of the sea captain —instant courage, sinewy strength in his slender six feet two of frame, keen intelligence and quick decisiveness. Yet he seemed not to like to go to sea—the story went that he was disastrously subject to seasickness! He was

never a loose talker, and his flashing smile was not often seen; yet he took delight in listening to others, and sometimes in telling tales about himself that were likely to be wildly imaginative. He seemed to want to make himself inconspicuous in any group; but he possessed a Latin ability to flare into steel-controlled anger or action, and a sense of the dramatic that glowed into life at most unexpected moments, often with a touch of surprisingly ironic humor.

Jean Lafitte knew he was a contradiction, and he enjoyed it. It is no puzzle that, as time went on, dozens of stories were told about him in the cafés and the courtyards of New Orleans.

The tales agreed on only one thing—the man was French. But he was made as many kinds of Frenchman as there are districts in France. He was born in Garonne, in the Hautes-Pyrenees; or in Brest; or in Bordeaux or St. Malo, in Marseilles or some unnamed French seaport. He was the child of a noble family, and his name was not Lafitte at all; he was the son of an humble seafarer, apprenticed to the ocean from early childhood.

Pierre Lafitte was not his brother, said another elaborate story; instead Pierre was the son of an old family servant. When young Jean's parents were guillotined at the height of the French Revolution, this old servant had taken the lad and fled. For protection the boy had

taken the servant's name, and in gratitude had taken the man's son Pierre under his wing!

Again, there was the tale that Jean had been for a time a resident of Martinique in the French West Indies, where he had labored on a sugar plantation. There he had fallen in love with the daughter of a neighboring Spanish official, had eloped with the girl to Jamaica and married her, had been lured back by promises of forgiveness and a share in the family jewels—had been thrown into prison! This sad story ends with Jean's escape several years later only to find that his discouraged bride had killed herself. And so Jean had become a slave runner, smuggling Negroes into the United States under the veil of a merchant trade.

Still another story told of piratical exploits—all at a time when Jean Lafitte would scarcely have been out of his teens—which took him all the way to the Indian Ocean. Here, as a French privateer, he harassed and conquered British merchantmen, accomplishing feats that would have shamed either Captain Kidd or Baron Münchausen. Then, honored and opulent in his own country, he turned westward and continued to attack Britishers in the West Indies. Then he became known as "The Terror of the Gulf." . . . In the years since these stories were passed from mouth to mouth, nobody has ever been able to discover an atom of proof for them.

Doubtless Jean knew of them, and chuckled silently over them. But not many of them approached the truth.

Jean Lafitte was born in Bordeaux in 1780, one of a family of several children. Nothing is known of his parents. But it was natural that this energetic and ambitious boy, inflamed by the fiery spirit of the French Revolution, which he witnessed, and reared in the shadow of a thousand masts—Bordeaux was one of France's great ports—should turn his thoughts toward the sea.

He ran away from home when he was hardly more than fifteen to join the crew of a British man-of-war. Father Lafitte sent after him and brought him back to Bordeaux. But Jean was not one to be easily balked. He ran away again, this time to enlist aboard the British frigate *Fox*. He served for some months, but he was not satisfied long. He deserted, and went to live with a French family in Deptford.

Still his craving for adventure, for danger was not sated. To Deptford, a London suburb with naval yards and wharves for deep-sea vessels, came ships bearing tales of fortune and trouble in the West Indies. Young Jean talked with seamen from these ships, and before long his mind was made up. He would go to South America.

So he shipped for Cartagena, a port in the Spanish settlement of Colombia, just east of the Isthmus of Panama. Here he lived for a time; later he moved northeast to

Santa Marta. These two small ports he found harboring the life he sought. Ports of Spain, they were hotbeds of rebellion. Colombia was the source of many millions of dollars in gold mined for the enrichment of the Spanish court. The residents of the colonies, the shipowners who carried the gold, resented the greed and the domination of Spain. Early in the new century insurrections broke out, and a handful of "independent republics" took form throughout the Caribbean Sea and the West Indies. The Republic of Cartagena was among them.

All of this was the essence of life to Jean Lafitte. It gave him the adventure his warm blood craved. The search for freedom appealed to his independent spirit and the love of liberty nurtured by the French Revolution in which he had grown up.

So the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico became home to him. He visited the West Indies and the United States and—according to his own tale—became a merchant in Santo Domingo when he was twenty-two. He engaged in privateering—a form of piracy legalized by authority from some government to plunder vessels of the particular nations with which it was at war.

"I had married a wife—she was rich and beautiful," he told a friend years later. "I determined to go to Europe, and I wound up my affairs in the West Indies. I sold my property there. I bought a ship, and loaded her,

besides which I had on board a large amount of specie, all that I was worth.

"Well, sir, when the vessel had been a week at sea, we were overhauled by a Spanish man-of-war, commanded by Señor Chevalier d'Alkala. The Spaniards captured us. They took everything—goods, specie, even my wife's jewels. They set us on shore upon a barren sand key, with just provisions enough to keep us alive a few days, until an American schooner took us off and landed us in New Orleans.

"I did not care what became of me. I was a beggar. My wife took the fever from exposure and hardship, and died in three days after my arrival.

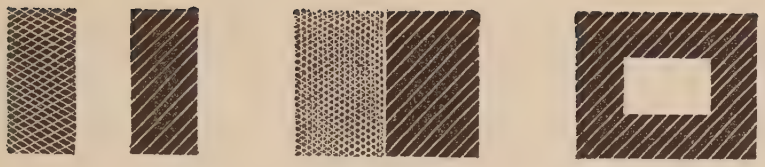
"I met some daring fellows who were as poor as I was. We bought a schooner, and declared against Spain an eternal war! . . . So long as I live I am at war with Spain—but no other nation."

Whether his tale of his wife and her death is true or merely a fanciful yarn there is no evidence to show. But certainly the hazel eyes, the tall handsome frame, the regular features, the gravely enigmatic air of the young privateer were attractive to women, and just as certainly he was attracted to them. Another tale tells of his having made Charleston, then the leading South Atlantic port of the new United States, his headquarters, of his having become involved in a love affair there

that led to a duel—an "affair of honor." In the duel, says the story, he killed his rival; and so he had to flee Charleston.

Those early years in the Caribbean and the Gulf taught Jean Lafitte two things. One was that he preferred life on shore to life on the sea. The other was that there was an easy manner of making a living open to him—a manner that might not have the sanction of legality but that frontier life in the Gulf seemed to approve. It would permit him to live at his ease ashore, with all the pleasant luxury his fastidious nature desired. That manner was the life of a smuggler.

And so, "on an unrecorded day between the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the year 1810"—unquestionably as early as 1807—Jean and Pierre Lafitte opened their smithy in New Orleans. How Pierre Lafitte, ex-sailor, came to join his brother is another mystery. Perhaps Pierre was one of those "daring fellows" who joined with Jean in the purchase of a privateering schooner. At any rate, to New Orleans they went, soon to become established citizens of the community.



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CHAPTER III

PRIVATEERS OF THE GULF

Pirates of the fame and name of Captain Kidd had not flourished in the Gulf of Mexico for many years. William Kidd himself had been hanged in England in 1701. Henry Morgan, most cruel and rapacious of the pirates of the West Indies, had died thirteen years earlier—died with a knighthood from King Charles II of England and the lieutenant-governorship of Jamaica to his credit. Edward Teach, the Blackbeard of pirate lore, had been killed in 1718 following his depredations in the Gulf.

But if there were no story-book pirates to harass the increasing commerce of the Gulf, there were men who terrorized it and plundered it and destroyed it, all under a guise of legality that let them go almost without moles-

* In sailors' lingo this means "take kare pirates."

tation. These were the privateers—the armed vessels that supplemented the navies of nations with wars on their hands. And in those days of revolution and the Napoleonic conquests, there were few nations not at war.

Privateering had been an honored profession for three and a half centuries before it attracted Jean Lafitte. Since 1450 it had been the custom for the sea captain with a liking for danger and an eye to quick profits to ally himself with some warring power for the purpose of preying on the enemy's shipping. He fitted out his own man-of-war, equipping it with whatever armament he could muster and a crew of men as hard as himself—often a crew of ruffians and criminals who dared set foot in no port in the world. Then he applied to a warring government and was given "letters of marque"—papers entitling him to attack the enemy's ships under the flag of his adopted nation.

For until about 1750 a man might procure his letters from any nation, regardless of his nationality. At that time, however, the leading nations agreed to issue papers only to their own citizens. Obviously the old haphazard method of making war could not help being roundly abused by the men who followed it. A privateer was entitled to keep the cargo of the prizes he took, to keep the vessels themselves if he wished, provided he brought the prizes into a port of the nation whose flag he flew

and had them approved by a court of admiralty. He was even awarded a bounty for the enemy's seamen or citizens he had taken prisoner or killed.

The Gulf of Mexico was an ideal scene in the opening days of the nineteenth century for the exploits of privateers. The three leading powers of Europe, France, England, and Spain, all had extensive holdings in the West Indies, the Caribbean, or the Americas; and there were wars aplenty among them. For Spain in particular, moreover, the lands bordering on the Gulf were figuratively or literally gold mines. From Mexico came tons of silver; from the islands of the Antilles group came sugar, cotton, coffee, spices, tropical fruits. From South America came not only products of the tropics but also a ceaseless flow of gold.

Fine pickings, indeed, for those who, like Lafitte, turned privateer! If they carried letters of marque from France, for instance, they had only to find a vessel flying the British or the Spanish flag, overtake and overcome it, and get the vessel or the valuable portion of its cargo to the nearest French port. They could scuttle the vessel if it was of no value to them; the captured crew—well, if the crew disappeared, it had been destroyed in legitimate warfare, and nobody was the wiser. The cargo, be it gold or silks or sugar, was theirs by due process of law, and they had only to take their profit.

There were many ways the privateers could profit. If the prize cargo were gold or silver or jewels, they could store it away or spend it openly. If it were merchandise they could sell it in the port where the admiralty court had passed on it; or, if the market there were poor, they could take it to some other port to dispose of it. They could carry it to New Orleans, the leading city of the Gulf, for instance; there they could enter it at the customs house, pay the duty and then sell it to merchants or to private buyers.

Or, if they didn't care to pay duty (and weren't finical about running afoul of the law), they could simply smuggle it in and sell it at a slightly lower price than the market offered. Still their profit would be most satisfactory. And the privateers found, in New Orleans, no scarcity of buyers for smuggled goods. The French residents of New Orleans, in the thirty years of Spanish domination before 1800, had bitterly resented Spanish customs laws. Resentment had led to tacit and even open approval of smuggling, and the habit had continued after Louisiana became United States territory.

It was this situation that made the occupation of smuggler or smuggler's agent so attractive to Jean Lafitte—this acceptance of smuggling combined with the man's desire to remain ashore and to live in comfort.

But just as Lafitte was establishing himself a new ele-

ment entered. On January 1, 1808, there became effective a law passed by Congress forbidding the importation of slaves into the United States. Up to now it had been perfectly legal to bring slaves from Africa, and the price of a first-class Negro was relatively low—a few hundred dollars. But the price shot up after the new law took effect. A slave could be bought on the African coast for as low as $20; in Cuba, where the legal slave trade was now diverted, the price was around $300. But in the Louisiana plantation country, where hundreds of Negroes were needed for cotton and sugar cultivation, the standard price rose to $800 or even $1000.

So slave smuggling was as important an occupation as the smuggling of other merchandise. And the privateer who could take as a prize a slaver with its cargo of "black ivory" was able to take advantage of the high Louisiana prices without paying even the $20 demanded in Africa for a Negro. Naturally, Lafitte added slaves to the list of contraband for which he was to become agent.

Moreover, privateering was becoming somewhat more difficult. British fleets active in American waters were capturing port after port from the French. That meant that French privateers had fewer and fewer havens to which they could take prizes to have them passed upon by courts of admiralty. In February 1810, Guadeloupe

fell before British arms, completing the list of their conquests in the West Indies over the French.

The end of French privateering in the Gulf left a number of privateer vessels without letters of marque, and they at once turned to the small republics revolting against Spain. These nations were eager to harm Spanish commerce any way they could, and they granted privateering commissions indiscriminately. Jean Lafitte himself obtained a commission from Cartagena, as did hundreds of other free-lance adventurers.

But Cartagena was a long voyage distant from the West Indies or New Orleans. Many days might be wasted in taking a prize all the way to South America for legal action, then bringing it back to market in Louisiana. And so more and more of the privateers came to direct their courses straight to the mouth of the Mississippi once they had taken a prize, without the formality of court proceedings.

That meant smuggling. For these prizes could not be entered through the customs house even if their owners had wished. They were illegal—they had no standing in law.

Obviously there was golden opportunity in New Orleans for a bold man. And Jean Lafitte was the man to take advantage of it.

CHAPTER IV

THE SMUGGLERS

The brothers Lafitte opened their new business in New Orleans modestly enough. The smithy in Saint Philip Street was a perfect blind—the black smiths there really did forge a few fetters for kaffles of slaves, the bellows really did blow and the hammers pound.

There was a practical side to the venture, too. A slave who knew the rudiments of the smith's trade was more valuable than one fresh from the African jungle, untrained and unskilled. So slaves smuggled into the United States through the thousand bayous that led into the coast from the Gulf were often brought to New Orleans and apprenticed in the Lafitte forge. Prospective buyers could then be brought to the shop, there to look the men over, feel their muscles as they would those of a horse, and see for themselves that the blacks knew something of the smith's craft.

Not all the slaves brought in were thus trained—the Lafittes handled too many for that. But the smithy was soon known as the headquarters for the brothers. There came the plantation owners from the north—there or to

the cottage next door, where they sipped coffee in the court and haggled over prices with Pierre and Jean.

Lafitte hospitality, particularly when Jean was the host, was something to talk about. Jean was an epicure. He loved fine silver and fine appointments for his table and his home; and he loved to entertain. Not all of the silks and linens and precious plate he smuggled into New Orleans went for sale. Some of it, and doubtless the choicest, he kept for his own use.

And so the brothers' home became a friendly haven for visitors. Pierre, of course, was not so sociably inclined as Jean—he was taciturn, sometimes thought surly. But Jean, polished and courteous, was always ready to discuss the merits of the current play at the theater, to boast of the latest wine he had procured, to laugh at the policies of the struggling new governor. He made his guests comfortable and welcome. And there was always in the background the ministering form of dark-skinned Adelaide Maselari, Pierre Lafitte's Santo Domingan mistress. Adelaide was the woman of the household, and she made it her task to see that guests' glasses were always filled, fresh cigars always within reach, sweets always at hand.

So there in the patio met New Orleans business men —Thiac the blacksmith, whose business was much like the Lafittes'; Huette the planter from northern New

Orleans, up near Lake Pontchartrain; Laporte the accountant; Grymes the attorney; Sauvinet the capitalist, whose money backed the Lafittes; these men and many others. In that court it was decided, as Jean had already suggested, that a shop in Royal Street for the sale of smuggled merchandise would be a wise venture; there arrangements were made with Sauvinet for money to establish it.

"You see," Jean told Sauvinet, his eyelid dropping in that droll wink that left the financier hardly knowing whether or not his host was joking, "one could hardly be expected to sell imported silks over a blacksmith's anvil!"

So the shop was established, among the stylish stores between Bienville and Saint Louis Streets. It became well-known as a source of fine goods of all kinds, and the Lafittes' business flourished. They were accepted by New Orleans business men as the commercial agents of the privateers.

Meantime, a new force was entering the smuggling business. At first, in all probability, Jean had merely in mind the sale of slaves and goods taken by his own privateering vessel. But the Gulf was speckled with privateers, and they all needed agents. If they all worked independently, prices might be forced down and they might commit acts of undue violence or cruelty which would

draw down the wrath of the government. Already there was growing up a colony of them on Barataria Bay, sixty miles straight south of New Orleans, that threatened trouble.

By early 1810 the privateers had been routed from the West Indies. They could have gathered at Cartagena or on the coast of Mexico, but these haunts were too far from the smugglers' best market, New Orleans. And the Louisiana coast just west of the mouth of the Mississippi was ideal for their purposes.

The Louisiana coast is a labyrinth of islands and inlets and bayous and bays and waterways. Boats can go from the Gulf, if their draft is small enough, for many miles inland; and there are so many twining bayous, hidden so intricately among cypresses and house-high canebrakes and other tropical swamp growths that they make an unsurpassed hideout for such vessels. For one who does not know them the bayous may mean quick and unpleasant death; not only are they populated by alligators and venomous scorpions and water moccasins, but they are so bewilderingly intertwined and so densely overgrown that a stranger may swiftly become hopelessly lost in them.

One of the largest of the bays is Barataria, separated from the Gulf by two long slim sand islands, Grande Terre and Grande Isle. Each is about six miles long and

a mile or so wide; the two are separated by a passage wide and deep enough to permit the entry from the Gulf, if their pilots know the route, of schooners and other deep-sea vessels. Barataria Bay is about eighteen miles long, and from its northern end a dozen bayous lead farther north into the sheltering swamps. The infamous Blackbeard had used the bay as a hiding-place in 1718.

It was Grande Terre that the homeless privateers selected for their colony. It had trees on it so that vessels on the bay side showed not even their masts to cruisers or revenue cutters in the Gulf. It afforded protection from Gulf hurricanes, and it was populated only by a few fishermen. Nobody there to cause the privateers trouble!

So Grande Terre was becoming a colony of the lawless. At first only a few vessels were using its shelter; then a score of rude shacks were built, and more and more privateers were bringing their hauls there. Making it a base of operations, they sent their vessels out through the passage to prey on commerce in the Gulf, returned to unload and to transfer slaves and merchandise to smaller boats, and eventually sold what they had obtained to residents of Louisiana.

There came to Grande Terre not only privateers but also dozens and scores of men seeking adventure or loot or sanctuary from the law. The colony grew in size and in desperation. There were fights, robberies, brawls over

disposition of booty. It was every man for himself, and blood ran hot and volatile.

Naturally, Jean Lafitte knew of the colony. As time wore on, he obtained increasing quantities of his slaves and his merchandise through its members. And the bent for organization and leadership developing in his active brain—he was now thirty years old—brought him quickly to see the danger brewing at Grande Terre.

"The group ought to be working together," he mused, "not at cross purposes. Uncontrolled and unorganized, they will be their own death; they will commit absurd excesses, and they will drive prices down to nothing. But operating as a unified society, under proper leadership, their strength and their profits will grow."

So he broached his plan to Pierre.

"I will go to Grande Terre," he said, "and make arrangements with the privateers for handling their prizes. Perhaps I will even remain there, to direct their cruises. You will stay in New Orleans as business agent——"

"But the new shop and the forge," objected Pierre. "One man cannot manage both."

"We no longer need the blacksmith shop," Jean answered. "We will close it, and keep only the store in Royal Street."

CHAPTER V

"BOS" OF THE PRIVATEERS

Traveling down to Grande Terre from New Orleans was no easy task. Jean Lafitte needed a guide for his first visits, for the route led for many miles through the tortuous bayous, each of them separating and twisting into a dozen others in which a stranger surely would have lost his way.

And even had Lafitte known the route, he would hardly have considered going alone. He was the gentleman and the master always, and he was not accustomed to doing his own work.

New Orleans is on the left bank of the Mississippi, and that means on the north bank, for the river flows from west to east here. With his guide and his boatmen—likely chosen from among his smuggled slaves—Lafitte first went to the busy New Orleans levee, where schooners from the Gulf and flatboats from up the river met to exchange cargoes. A small boat took him across the river, and there he traveled by foot, horse- or muleback, or carriage a few hundred yards to the head of a little bayou that led toward the west.

Here he embarked in a pirogue—a canoe hollowed out of a solid log—for the long trip down the bayou. For some six miles the bayou wound toward the west, through heavily wooded swamps that delighted Lafitte's love of beauty. Great live oaks arched their branches, hung with silvery-green moss, over the little stream, often completely shutting out the brilliant sun. Feathery cypresses with their heavy "knees" clustered in the swamp; palmettos and oleanders, willows and long-needled pines fought toward the light wherever the branches above let it through. Lavender water hyacinths with their thick big green leaves floated on the water, often blanketing the bayou's surface and making hard work of paddling the pirogue.

Alligators floated along the banks, diving under water with clumsy splashings as the pirogue approached. Their

hoarse barks and their angry hisses punctuated the silence. Gray-blue herons and snowy egrets sat in the branches or flew lazily away, always following the course of the bayou, as the human visitors came near. Hundreds of little fur-bearers swam or scuttled away—muskrats in particular abounded. Occasionally larger animals, a black bear or a deer, rustled out of sight along their narrow runs.

For six miles the bayou led west. Then it angled south, pursuing its sluggish course for forty miles to a large lake. Now the swamp vegetation changed. The big trees gradually disappeared, and for miles on either hand Lafitte saw only flat swamp land covered with marsh grass high as a man's head. Across this lake, another wider bayou led into a second lake, this one so large that Lafitte could barely discern, on its southern rim, two low-lying islands —Grande Terre and Grande Isle. This was Barataria Bay, and it was necessary to change to a larger boat. For the wind gets almost uninterrupted sweep from the Gulf here, and a pirogue might be capsized in a twinkling.

The land's appearance changed again. The low grass flats—"trembling prairies"—continued along the shores, but they were broken at long intervals by higher islands —shell mounds of firmer land with green clumps of oaks and pines on them. At the left, as the boat progressed down the lake, was an island gray with pelicans, squat-

ting calmly at rest or flying low along the water with long lazy beats of their big wings. Gulls circled and screamed overhead.

The boat ran through schools of jellyfish. Hundreds of porpoises rose slowly out of water and circled from sight again, their black sides and big fins glistening in the sun. A handful of small boats dotted the bay—fishermen seeking redfish and sea trout, or sailing to the shrimp and oyster grounds.

At last, at the end of a two-day journey, Lafitte arrived at Grande Terre.

Already there were some five or six hundred men making the island their headquarters. And a strange, sinister lot they were. First, the fishermen—men whose families had made their homes here for half a century, who knew the bayous of southern Louisiana as they knew the winding paths of their own island homes, who had gradually changed from fishing to smuggling because it offered so much larger profits and because, with the current tolerance toward it, it furnished so safe and easy an occupation.

Second, the privateers and the hard, roistering men whom privateering always attracted. Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, New Englanders, Dutch; outcasts from Santo Domingo and Guadeloupe and Mar-

tinique; men of every color and tongue and nature. Men who lived by danger and cruelty and lust; men who brooked no interference with their trade, men who killed as readily as they ate. Men who went out on the sea to plunder and rob, who returned to Grande Terre to dispose of their prizes, to gamble and drink and fight and carouse.

Jean Lafitte found trouble on Grande Terre. The first group, fishers who had turned smugglers, resented the intrusion of the second band, whom they considered outlaws. The privateers laughed at the pretensions of the smugglers, scorned their "rights." There is the story that the newcomers once captured on the Gulf a vessel loaded with slaves for which the smugglers had sent to Africa —that the vessel disappeared but that the Negroes soon arrived on Grande Terre to be sold to plantation owners. Blood-spilling, inevitably, was just ahead.

But the arrival of Lafitte quickly altered all this. Amazingly soon the colony accepted him as the leader it so badly needed. He was no stranger. Many of the smugglers and the privateers had known him in New Orleans. His reputation as a smugglers' agent was established, and his mysterious past as a rover gave him standing.

Moreover, this tall unsmiling man had power in himself. He assumed that his orders were given to be obeyed;

he rendered quick justice when they were not. Before long his men had conferred on him an unofficial title—"bos," or leader.

So his plan for centralizing the operations of the colony under one head gradually took shape. He formed a kind of trust—a smugglers' monopoly which would have been called, in later days, a gang of racketeers.

Lafitte never permitted himself to be called pirate, a term often applied to him and to others who followed the privateering life. He admitted frankly that his smuggling operations were illegal, but his seizures of ships on the seas were always legitimately carried out, he said, under the terms of his letters of marque.

Lafitte's own letters of marque were from Cartagena, as were those of most of the captains under his direction. And so the Barataria colony came to carry on unceasing war against the commerce of Spain on the Gulf of Mexico. "So long as I live I am at war with Spain," Lafitte repeated more than once.

Pierre Lafitte, too, might have become an active leader among the privateers. But in the summer of 1810 he was ill—he suffered a "stroke" that partially paralyzed him. And so he continued the less active share of the Lafitte business. He remained in New Orleans, and Jean decided to make Grande Terre his residence.

CHAPTER VI

DOMINIQUE YOU AND GAMBI

One day about this time there appeared at the door of the Lafitte shop in New Orleans a short, broad-shouldered man, with fiery black eyes and a scar from temple to chin showing white against the weathered bronze of his face. He spoke to one of the employees:

"M'sieu Jean Lafitte—is he in?"

The answer was negative—M. Lafitte was absent but would return later. The man's black eyes showed impatience; he turned on his heel with the muttered announcement that he was off for a "tot of rum." He would be back later.

He came back later, and he found the younger Lafitte. So Jean became acquainted with Dominique You, native of Santo Domingo, cannoneer for Napoleon, privateer famed from one side of the Gulf to the other for his daring and his exploits. He was to become within a year Lafitte's chief lieutenant and one of his most intrepid commanders.

Thus came man after man to join the forces of the rapidly growing Baratarian colony. One was Vincent

Gambi the Italian, a surly, hot-tempered, privateer of unsavory reputation. One was the scar-faced Chighizola, called by reason of his saber-slashed nose "Nez Coupé" —Cut Nose. One was Captain William Mitchell, a man whose later ambitions to become a second Lafitte brought disaster upon him. One was René Beluche, an artilleryman like Dominique You. And there were many others.

They came to New Orleans and they came to Grande Terre. For Jean Lafitte was leading two lives—the life of a mild-mannered gentleman in the city and that of a stern corsair commander on the island. He could be found first one place, then the other; he traveled frequently back and forth between the two.

And he seems to have combined business with pleasure in both places. No doubt it was usually business that brought him to New Orleans—business with Sauvinet the financier, with Davezac the merchant, with John R. Grymes the new district attorney or with Pierre his brother. Or, perhaps, business with plantation owners from up the river, or with merchants from other cities. For the reputation of the Lafitte establishment was spreading, and buyers of slaves and merchandise came from what then seemed great distances to take advantage of the superior wares and lower prices the smugglers offered.

In the city his social position, in early 1810, was becoming even more secure. He was seen with New Or-

leans' "best citizens"; his name was on the list of patrons for the balls and festivals. He entertained at dinners at his home, and in the coffee houses and cafés where men of the city met for their *apéritifs*. His manner was courteous and reserved, but friendly and sometimes sprightly and humorous. He rarely visited his friends in their homes—the fine Creole ladies of New Orleans could never quite bring themselves to accept this smuggler with whom their husbands did business. As early as 1810 the newly American city was becoming infected with the feeling that complete disregard of the customs laws, so long tolerated, could not be wholly countenanced.

But Lafitte never showed that he felt slighted. He circulated wherever he wished, and often among his recruits to go back with him to Barataria were the sons of his friends and customers. Certainly he was not considered a leprous criminal.

If he was a pleasant, light-hearted gentleman in New Orleans, however, he was quite another man at Barataria. Here he became the overlord and the dictator. The men there were of a different stripe, and Jean Lafitte had a different manner of meeting them.

True, he gambled with them. He sometimes drank and joked with them. But he never let it be forgotten that he was master.

In the center of the colony of thatched little cottages,

in 1811, he had built a house of sturdy masonry, contrasting sharply with the flimsy structures that surrounded it. It had a wide veranda for the easy lounging that its owner enjoyed; its brick construction kept it cool in the blinding heat of the white Gulf sun. It was furnished with the finest of the silks and linens and plate and elegant furniture that the vessels brought in almost daily.

Here Jean Lafitte made his plans, held his councils, and directed his men. Here he decided that all vessels operating from Grande Terre must hold Cartagenian letters of marque, licensing them to fly the Bolivian pennant and make war on Spain. Here he entertained his visitors from the north, invariably amazing them with the luxury and refinement of his household.

But here he was in a sense a recluse from the majority of the brigands who made up his colony, now including a thousand men. Nearby was the big barracoon or slave warehouse, frequently housing hundreds of captives in chains—captives taken by Lafitte privateers from Cuban slave traders (as Lafitte pointed out to his captains, it was quicker and cheaper to take the slaves as "prizes of war" from vessels which had gone to Africa than to send their own ships across the Atlantic). Nearby, too, were the gambling houses and the cafés. And all around were the little homes where the men and their women lived.

With the men Lafitte had few direct dealings. He gov-

erned through his lieutenants, and only on rare occasions did he go to the lesser members of the colony to make his will felt. He did not attempt to watch the morals or manners of the men, unless trouble was threatening; then his hand fell like lightning, and with lightning's effect.

One such occasion gives a characteristic picture of the privateer leader. He had been gambling with a group of the men, and a dispute had arisen. A cut of the cards was needed to decide whether Lafitte or one of the seamen was to get the pile of Spanish gold on the table, and there were ugly mutterings. Cups from which the players had been drinking were pushed aside, hands crept to knives and pistols. Suddenly Lafitte was on his feet, a menacing tall figure in black. His slim fingers held his own pistol steady as a rock, and dead silence fell.

"We will seek an outsider to cut the cards," he announced coldly. "That way there can be no question. Who shall it be?"

One of the men, Rigaud, volunteered a suggestion. His family lived across the pass on Grande Isle, and his little daughter Marie was there. Would she not be an ideal arbiter?

The suggestion was approved. So Rigaud was dispatched in a boat to Grande Isle, and before long he returned with the little girl. She was in terror at the sight she saw—the imperious Lafitte with cold hazel eyes, a

man with big gold earrings glaring furiously at him. But she went to the table and cut the cards. She showed the ten of diamonds.

That released the tension. Lafitte laughed and returned his long pistol to his belt. He raked the gold together as the men joked nervously. The man with the earrings slunk sullenly from the room.

And Jean Lafitte, as Rigaud started to leave, called pleasantly to little Marie.

"Here," he said, "this is for you."

He tossed her a Spanish coin—a memento for Marie Rigaud of the most thrilling moment of her life!

Another time a more threatening incident occurred. Lafitte had been emphasizing, before a group of his leaders in his home, his dictum that only Spanish vessels were to be taken as prizes—their letters of marque entitled his men to attack ships of no other nation. Particularly, he said, must they allow American shipping to go free.

There were murmurs at this. Some of the captains were angry at the edict. Prizes were prizes, they said, whatever flag they flew——

"Only Spanish ships may you attack," repeated Jean Lafitte. "That is my law."

Eventually all were won over but Vincent Gambi the Italian—Gambi and his men were known to resent the rule of Lafitte. He left the council, and Lafitte learned

that he was inflaming his hot-tempered crew with news of the ultimatum. Lafitte went to his veranda, and presently he saw a piratical young giant stride threateningly toward him, pistol in his hand.

"The men of Gambi take orders from no man but Gambi," shouted the sailor. "Neither you nor anybody else——"

There was a crashing shot. A pistol in Lafitte's slowly lowering hand smoked silently. The man pitched forward.

That was the end of the Gambi rebellion.

Naturally stories as false as they are fantastic grew up around a man living so dramatically as Jean Lafitte sometimes lived. One said that, when the governor of an unnamed city in the West Indies refused a Lafitte captain permission to land and get water for his vessel, Lafitte at once boarded a ship and sailed to that city. There he kidnaped the governor, his secretary, and his confessor; taking the three aboard his ship, he showed the governor three gibbets dangling freshly strung nooses. The terror-stricken man paid $50,000 for his life, and Lafitte sailed away. . . .

CHAPTER VII

OPPOSITION

So THE business of the colony grew, and so the colony itself came to have more and more members. There was rarely a time when a dozen vessels were not riding at anchor in the harbor. Directly under Lafitte control were that many ships—schooners, brigantines, and the rakish lateen-rigged feluccas of low draft and high speed—and all of them carried Cartagenian letters of marque.

Other vessels anchored there, too, as the reputation of the Baratarian settlement spread. For the Gulf was crowded with privateers which blockaded ports under the Spanish flag to capture as prizes the merchantmen coming in or going out. Legally the privateers should have taken their captures to Cartagena for condemnation. But it was so much easier to sail for Grande Terre and there to dispose of cargoes to Jean Lafitte . . . easier, quicker, and more profitable, even though Lafitte might not pay as high a price for prize goods as they would bring in legal market.

All of this business and all of the other affairs of the colony the thirty-year-old leader managed with an iron

hand, and a just one. Imbroglios like that with Gambi were infrequent. Lafitte directed his captains and divided the spoils in a manner that convinced the men of his desire to treat everybody squarely if everybody played squarely with him.

He always insisted that their war was only with vessels of Spain. He met with some success in this claim, for if ever question arose he was always able to produce cargo manifests and papers to show that his commanders had followed the laws of privateering.

But that some of his men lapsed from privateering to straightforward piracy there can be little doubt. Though Gambi and his men had been cowed by that display of Jean Lafitte's steel will and his ability to flash into vigorous action, though they ostensibly bowed to his command, they undoubtedly evaded his order when they could. It was all too easy to find a valuable British or French or even American prize on the high seas, where there were no witnesses; to take it captive, transfer its cargo of goods or slaves, and destroy ship and crew, the only evidence.

Even before Lafitte had built his house on the island a rude fort had been thrown up. It was little more than an earthen embankment, roughly square in shape, placed on one of the shell mounds that gave it commanding position. To the south it faced the open Gulf. To the north

it overlooked the bay where were anchored the privateering vessels and the smaller boats by which loot was transported up the bay and bayous to New Orleans. Lafitte garrisoned the fort and, though for years he had no occasion to use it, kept it in readiness to withstand attack.

Meantime, authorities in New Orleans were becoming uneasy about this lawless community. Governor Claiborne in particular felt that something must be done to curb its activities. He faced a gigantic task.

For he had to work without public sympathy. Many of New Orleans' leading business men were openly in league with Jean and Pierre Lafitte. Reputable citizens of the city and the territory carried on thinly veiled transactions with the smugglers, either in New Orleans or at the Baratarian settlement. If the Governor succeeded in preventing smuggling, he would deal a severe blow to the city's growing commerce.

And when such men as Grymes, one of Claiborne's chief assistants, and Davezac and Sauvinet and a score of others openly hobnobbed with Jean Lafitte and roundly approved him, the rest of the city was not too eager to frown on him.

Besides, William C. C. Claiborne himself was by no means a popular figure. Though he had been appointed Governor in 1804 and had served six years, he still seemed an outsider to many of the Creole residents of Louisiana.

Claiborne was little older than Jean Lafitte. He was born in Virginia in 1775. He was a round-faced, determined, but not always tactful young lawyer, unquestionably earnest in his desire to perform his duties in full accord with his country's laws, but sometimes failing to choose the wisest methods. He did not fully understand the Creole point of view: to him smuggling was smuggling, though to New Orleans it was merely a convenient, time-honored means of overcoming an unpopular restriction.

To make his task harder, Claiborne found sadly meager facilities at hand for policing his territory. The youthful nation, with its seat of government so far away, could not send soldiers or vessels at will to a distant and what then seemed, in Washington, an unimportant point merely to halt a band of smugglers. And the Territory had no extra forces itself.

Nevertheless, Claiborne was determined. As early as January 1810, he wrote to President James Madison to tell of possible trouble:

> It is confidently reported that two or three vessels have lately sailed from Pensacola for the Coast of Africa, and design to return with a cargo of Negroes. These will be carried to the rich Spanish settlement of Baton Rouge, and such as cannot be sold there will

probably be conveyed across the Mississippi and disposed of in the Territory of Orleans.

A mild-enough warning. But it was only the first of a long series of cries for help which Claiborne and some of his assistants were to send to Washington. That Claiborne had authoritative information, moreover, is shown by the letter written on September 6, 1810, by Thomas B. Robertson, secretary of the Territory, who was Acting Governor while Claiborne was absent on leave in Baltimore:

> You have no doubt heard of the late introduction of African slaves amongst us. Two cargoes have already been smuggled into this Territory by the way of Barataria and Lafourche, and I am fully convinced from a variety of circumstances which have come to my knowledge that an extensive and well-laid plan exists to evade or to defeat the operation of the laws of the United States on that subject. The open and daring course which is now pursued by a set of brigands who infest our coast, and overrun our country, is calculated to excite the strongest indignation in the breast of every man who feels the slightest respect for the wise and politic institutions under which we live.
>
> At this moment, upwards of one hundred slaves are held by some of our own citizens in the very teeth of

> the most positive laws, and notwithstanding every exertion which has been made, so general seems to be the disposition to aid in the concealment that but faint hopes are entertained of detecting the parties and bringing them to punishment. I have thought it advisable to . . . call upon you to use all the means in your power to give efficacy to a system of law founded on the purest principles of humanity and the soundest views of enlightened policy.

The efforts of Claiborne and Robertson seem merely to have served as advertising. Purchasers flocked to Barataria, and orders for merchandise were received even from Philadelphia and New York. More of the low fast schooners and feluccas appeared to prey on Spanish trade in the Gulf. And tales that they more and more frequently took the easy step from robbing Spanish vessels to robbing merchantmen of other nations continued to appear.

"It was ascertained," said a Treasury Department document, "that vessels clearing out from New Orleans with passengers have been captured and every soul murdered. They took indiscriminately vessels of every nation, and the fact was perfectly known."

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAYS OF A SMUGGLER

JEAN LAFITTE, secure in his comfortable home on Grande Terre, chuckled amusedly at governmental concern.

"Did words ever sink a pirogue?" he asked Dominique You as they sipped wine in the candle light.

Dominique, bluff and hearty, roared with laughter.

"I think I will auction my next cargo of slaves on the Governor's doorstep," he rumbled, his dark eyes snapping.

But then Lafitte's face turned sober. "Some day, Dominique, these words may mean action. You and the rest of my men must be circumspect." Then his left eye closed drolly. "But for the present—Governor Claiborne has little time for smugglers!"

For Jean Lafitte knew well that other affairs were more than occupying the Governor. He kept up with current events, and he knew, for instance, that September of 1810 had brought a crisis in the affairs of the Territory of Orleans. In that month insurgents against Spain, which still held Florida and what was known as West Florida—a strip of land along the Gulf coming almost to New

Orleans, and reaching to the Mississippi at Baton Rouge—had attacked and taken that city, to establish the Territory of West Florida as a "free and independent state."

And on October 27th President Madison had issued a proclamation annexing the Territory to the United States, appointing Claiborne to govern it along with his Territory of Orleans, and directing him to take immediate steps to put it under United States law. On December 7th he had hoisted the American flag at St. Francisville, and he was heavily involved in his new duties.

New troubles faced the Governor early in 1811, when the fort on Grande Terre was being completed. Chief among them was a Negro insurrection—an event for which Louisiana officials held Lafitte at least indirectly responsible. For, it was said, slaves lately smuggled into the Territory had incited it—and who but the Lafittes were chiefly at fault in bringing in these slaves?

The insurrection rose in January in the Parish of St. John the Baptist, thirty-six miles above New Orleans on the left bank of the Mississippi. Starting as a small band of howling blacks divided into companies, each with its officers, it grew into a mob of some five hundred slaves, forcing all Negroes it met to join it. Marching southeast toward New Orleans, the mob burned four or five plantation homes before it could be checked.

Most of the planters, learning of the approaching

mob, took their families and their valuables and fled. But one, a man named Trepagnier, was not to be so terrorized. He sent his wife and children to a place of safety, then loaded several fowling pieces with buckshot and took his stand on a high circular gallery which belted his house.

There he waited the approach of the maddened mob. He could see the road for some distance, and at length the yelling, blood-thirsty throng swept into view, coming toward his gate. Calmly he stood there, one man against five hundred.

Straight to the gates came the mob. But there it halted. Trepagnier was known to be an expert shot, and the mere courage of the man was enough to intimidate the Negroes. Their leaders stopped; their angry shrieks died during a brief conference. Then the mob passed on, with shouted promises of returning at night to cut Trepagnier's throat!

That was the end of the rebellion, however. For Major Milton had hastened down from Baton Rouge with a company of regulars, and General Wade Hampton had come up from New Orleans to his aid. The soldiers and reinforcements of militia soon surrounded the blacks, and a disastrous slaughter followed. Sixty-six of the Negroes died on the spot; many more were wounded or driven into the swamps to die. Sixteen captives were taken to New

Orleans, tried and convicted. Before long their heads appeared on long poles at intervals along the river as solemn warning of the fate awaiting others who dared try what they had tried.

There were no others. But the official investigation into the insurrection reiterated the charge that newly smuggled Negroes had been responsible, and though many of Lafitte's friends in New Orleans sniffed at the suggestion the whole occurrence did nothing to improve his position.

Nevertheless, rather than abate his activities, he extended them. By 1812 he had established a kind of substation in the bayous at what was known as the Temple —a shell mound covered with oaks north and a little west of Lake Barataria. Here he held frequent auctions of slaves and of merchandise, and here dozens of merchants and planters came to select their purchases. As many as four hundred slaves were sold here in one day, to be smuggled through customs lines by their new owners.

Lafitte was finding more and more paths to New Orleans, too. There were scores of routes from Barataria—scores of bayous through which his pirogues and skiffs might slip on their way to market. But, to avoid too heavy a concentration of his illicit traffic, he had started to send some of his vessels by way of Bayou Lafourche, a long, wide stream that emptied into the Gulf twenty-

five miles west of Grande Terre and led to the Mississippi above New Orleans. At the junction was the village of Donaldsonville, and this too became known as a Lafitte headquarters, where buyers might find the wares they sought.

So life went smoothly along in the privateers' colony. Vessels sailed into port, unloaded their cargoes in the cool of early morning or of twilight, sailed boldly out for new prizes. The blazing sun shone down at midday on palm-thatched cottages, on heavy-jawed, fierce-eyed, half-naked men, on dark-skinned women dressed in gorgeous gowns taken from the holds of Spanish vessels. In the sun's azure light the settlement lay quiet; when evening and a sea breeze brought relief from the heat, the men gathered to gamble and curse, to tell tall tales of their exploits, to drink and fight and eventually to fall into sodden sleep. . . . Legend says that Jean Lafitte fought four duels here on Grande Terre and became known as the *gladiateur infernal*—hell-born swordsman. More likely he maintained order through the prestige of his flashing blade rather than its use. His stern thin lips and his cold eyes were effective weapons with his men.

Meantime, with all his new duties, Claiborne pressed his demands for action against the Baratarian pirates, as he called them. Finally, in 1812, his demands were par-

tially gratified. A company of dragoons was formed, under Captain Andrew Hunter Holmes, and it set forth, forty men strong, in boats down the bayous toward Grande Terre.

When Lafitte heard of the expedition, as he very soon did through fishermen whose pirogues Holmes's men had searched in vain, he merely laughed. Even if the party were strong enough to be of any avail against his force of a thousand men, how could it hope to blockade all the routes to New Orleans? It was a hopeless quest, and Lafitte accented its hopelessness by transporting more rather than less goods to market, using a dozen different routes.

But he did take certain precautions. He added to the fortification on Grande Terre—several cannon were set up. He gave his men fresh instructions as to wariness and secrecy. And he decided that either he himself, Pierre—who had now given up the Royal Street shop and come to Barataria to live with Jean—or some other man high in command, Beluche or Dominique or Nez Coupé, must accompany each shipment of goods or slaves that left the island for the Temple, for Donaldsonville, or for New Orleans.

He laughed at the government's efforts. Yet he took some notice of them. For, in reply to one of the threats made against him, he said:

"I desire you to know that I am averse to strifes, but at the same time you must distinctly understand that I prefer losing my life rather than my goods."

Later in the year Claiborne made another appeal for help, this time addressing General James Wilkinson, a man who retained an important army post in spite of his one-time allegiance to Spain and his recent trial for treason. Claiborne's letter told of "a serious opposition to the revenue laws by an armed banditti on the Lake Barataria. The customs collector requests military aid in enforcing the laws, which I trust you will be enabled to afford."

CHAPTER IX

"HALT—OR WE FIRE!"

For several months all went well. Perhaps too well. For the Lafittes failed to realize that in this young Captain Andrew Hunter Holmes they had a persistent and determined foe.

It was easy to locate Holmes's camp and to avoid it. He moved it from time to time, but the Baratarians knew scores of routes to the city.

Caution relaxed. On the night of November 11, 1812, two of Lafitte's men became unduly bold. Traveling in their pirogue toward New Orleans with a small load of contraband, they attempted to slip down the very bayou on which Holmes had posted a picket. Creeping along under the shadow of the opposite bank, they believed they could escape notice. But suddenly a hail rang out.

"Halt! Who are you?"

Discovered, the men dug in furiously with their paddles. Another hail:

"Halt—or I'll shoot!"

Immediately a musket crashed and the smugglers heard a ball spat into the water, uncomfortably near. That

was an effective argument. They turned their little craft to the opposite shore, and when they reached it they found the whole picket, drawn by the sentry's shot. Captain Holmes hurried up.

The smugglers in the pirogue remained glumly silent. They refused to admit connection with Lafitte or with the Baratarian colony. And Captain Holmes had bigger game in view. The pirogue held an insignificant amount of goods; he confiscated it, warned the men sharply, and permitted them to go on their way.

This minor adventure threw the smugglers even more off their guard. The men had been caught red-handed—yet Holmes had let them go free. Now would be the time to smuggle in a real load of contraband!

So, five nights later, a little fleet of five lightly armed skiffs and pirogues sailed near the Temple, one of the boats heavily laden with cinnamon and other goods. The fleet's route was thirty-five miles away from Holmes's camp, far enough for safety. And what difference did it make, anyway, if they were apprehended? Holmes merely took the goods and let the men go. . . .

They hardly bothered with concealment, even though both Jean and Pierre Lafitte were in the group. Sailing across the large lake near the Temple, they would soon make the bayou, and the rest would be easy.

And then, suddenly, a second fleet of small boats shot

out from the black shadow of the nearby shore into brilliant moonlight. It was a complete surprise. Jean Lafitte's spies had not reported any Holmes men within miles. Yet they had been lurking on the shore, and when the sails of the smugglers' fleet appeared they had embarked silently and swooped down like vultures.

The Baratarians, cursing, fled. Sails rattled down and the men manned the oars, heading for shore. But the soldiers had the jump on them. Swiftly the revenue officers bore down; when they were eighty yards away they hailed the smugglers.

Jean Lafitte answered calmly with a question:

"What boat is that?"

"United States troops," came the reply.

Silence for a moment, while Jean consulted briefly with Pierre. Then:

"If you come nearer, we will fire into you and kill you everyone!"

At first Lafitte had feared the attackers might have been outlaws, seeking to steal his cargo. Now, as the fleets approached each other, there was no longer any doubt. Standing in the stern of the nearest boat Jean could see Captain Holmes, in summer uniform of white jacket and pantaloons. He could see the dragoon garb of the men—some in blue corded with white, some in blue turned up with red facings. Many of them wore dragoon helmets

with their distinctive plumes. And—clinching argument! —they all bore muskets with black bayonets, and wore round their bodies white cartridge-box belts.

"At the distance of thirty paces it was not possible to mistake our men for ordinary citizens," Captain Holmes reported later.

Jean Lafitte's threat had been bluff. He could not hope to oppose so well-armed a force with his disordered crew, poorly armed as it was. He ordered his men to attempt escape.

But Holmes forestalled them. Seeing the smugglers close to shore, he commanded all of his boats except one to land; that one, with fifteen men, was ordered to row in from the front and prevent flight by water.

"Instant death if you leave your boats!" shouted somebody from the Baratarian group. Some of them were now ashore, making for the marsh land. But the soldiers cut them off. No longer could Lafitte control his band. In wild disorder they leaped for the boats again, only to find fifteen muskets facing them from the boat Holmes had left in the lake.

Lafitte saw the hopelessness of it. He decided quickly.

"We surrender," he called.

Still some of the men hoped to escape. While Holmes's party was closing in, one boatload of smugglers suddenly bent to its oars and headed down the shore. A boat sped

after it. There was a fusillade of shots. From the smugglers' boat came a smothered groan—one man was killed. And the boat surrendered.

Holmes's captives were a sullen, angry crew. Pierre Lafitte was surly and refused to talk. Jean alone kept his composure as the two fleets rowed across the lake to the soldiers' new encampment.

Arrived there, Holmes ordered the boats searched and the names of the prisoners taken. One man had thrown a musket overboard as the attack commenced, he declared; Holmes found three light flintlock muskets loaded and cocked, two razor-edged swords, a dagger and a knife "intended to be used as a dirk from the manner in which it was ground." Poor armament indeed to oppose the dragoons! And, said the smugglers, intended only for peaceable purposes—one man asked the return of his musket on the ground that he needed it for killing ducks!

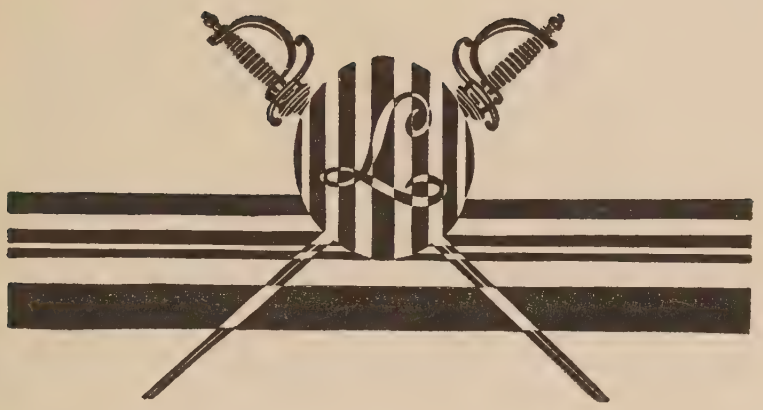
The contraband consisted mostly of cinnamon—twenty-six bales of it—and a quantity of shirts and other linens. The total value was later assessed at $4,004.89, a big seizure in those days.

Holmes took occasion to question Lafitte in detail, asking him particularly about a privateer said to have been in Lake Barataria recently. The smugglers' leader replied freely. He knew of the vessel, he said, but he denied connection with her operations.

"She is, however," he added, "a vessel of considerable force."

So, for the first time, the brothers Lafitte were arrested. The next day Holmes set forth for New Orleans with all his captives and the contraband; there were twenty-five men, and the dragoons took them all to the city in safety except one who escaped as they neared New Orleans. There, on November 19th, they were duly charged with transporting smuggled goods, and trial was set for November 29th.

But the Lafittes and their men did not remain in prison. Bond was arranged, and the smugglers regained their freedom.



CHAPTER X

"—THAT MAN LAFITTE!"

Though official New Orleans was concerned about the Lafitte colony, the unofficial city was little disturbed by Baratarian lawlessness. Jean Lafitte was fast assuming the character of a civic hero—a man engaged in an occupation that was popular if illegal, and one who could be relied on, with his impudence and his audacity, to furnish plenty of chuckles for the coffee houses and the tea tables of the city. Besides, there were many matters of greater importance to worry the city in that year of 1812.

January 10th had brought to the city its first steamboat—the first ever to churn the waters of the stolid Mississippi. To New Orleans's craving for increase in its commerce this fire-breathing creation with its unparalleled speed was a promise of wealth and a quick growth in population. New Orleans business men in their squat beaver top hats, tail coats, and tight pantaloons, as well as their ladies in high-waisted, low-necked gowns, flocked to the levees to see the marvel.

On April 8th President Madison signed Congress's bill making Louisiana a full-fledged state. Governor Claiborne, in spite of his lack of popularity, was at once elected the state's chief officer, and he and other leading citizens were busy putting into effect the new laws which statehood brought.

And on June 18th Congress declared that it could no longer tolerate Great Britain's blockade of American ports and her impressing of seamen from American ships into her own service—an abuse of years' standing, following on England's assertion that a man once British was always British. A state of war existed, Congress said, and the President was empowered "to use the whole land and naval force of the United States to carry the same into effect."

Life in New Orleans was gay, and it was exciting. It all centered around the Place d'Armes—the big iron-

fenced square could still accommodate most of the 12,000 residents of the Gulf's leading port. Strolling in the square, or sitting in the cafés that faced it or lined the streets near it, or walking along the levee just east of it to watch the red-sailed fishers' boats and the trading ships, were to be seen not only the fashionable Creoles of the city but also the motley crowd of sailors from all over the world, of bright-eyed, handsome quadroon women distinguished by their head-handkerchiefs, of free Santo Domingans and of plumed red-and-blue dragoons.

On Sunday afternoon, November 25th, the Place d'Armes was especially animated. It was a lovely golden day—a spring day somehow escaped into the opening of winter. And the name of Jean Lafitte was on every lip.

Only six days before, on Monday, the Lafittes had been formally charged with smuggling. That was enough to set tongues chattering. But there was more. An American merchantman, the *Independence*, had been attacked by pirates in the Gulf. Only one man had escaped. And he had just turned up in New Orleans to tell his story—a story that, in conjunction with Captain Holmes's tale of a privateer at Barataria, at once led to guesses that the smugglers' colony might have been involved.

For many asserted firmly that the Baratarians, Jean Lafitte included, were no better than pirates. Lafitte's vessels controlled the commerce of the Gulf—they had

driven out all other privateers. And some believed that Lafitte's claim that his ships plundered only Spanish traders was a mere blind. Hence, if a ship were attacked—"that man Lafitte!"

At this very moment the lone survivor of the *Independence* was closeted with Governor Claiborne and District Attorney John Grymes, somebody said—closeted in the Cabildo, the stern big building at the west corner of the Place d'Armes, with its round Spanish arches and its barred windows. Everywhere the word passed. What tale was the man telling? Would he bring forth evidence that the pirate had sailed under orders from Grande Terre?

Questions like these agitated the entire square. They were asked by vendors of fruits and sweet cakes and pralines, the brown-sugar-and-pecan sweetmeat so popular in New Orleans. They were asked by conservative older men in the cocked hats and silken knee-breeches that had passed out of style; they were asked by young dandies in beaver hats, green broadcloth coats, skin-tight fawn-colored trousers, and handsome tasseled boots. City Guards in sky-blue asked them of dragoons in darker uniforms; lavishly dressed quadroons, the favorites of the fashionable men of the city, asked them of their red- and yellow-turbaned woman companions.

Every conversation, it seemed, was flavored by the same topic. Even the sycamores and the palmettos, the oleanders and the shrubs in the square seemed to whisper it:

"Will they involve Jean Lafitte in this, too?"

And then, suddenly, there came a little stir at the edge of the square opposite St. Louis Cathedral. Voices there stilled. Necks craned as a momentary hush fell.

Jean Lafitte was walking through the iron gateway into the Place d'Armes, gayer and more debonair than usual, chatting easily and smilingly with his brother Pierre.

Jean seemed to have groomed himself with special care to show his disregard of what New Orleans may have thought. His costume was black, but it was immaculate. His hair was carefully trimmed and oiled, and his long sideburns glistened against his olive cheeks. He bowed now and then to acquaintances, or removed his hat with a sweeping flourish. Gayly and nonchalantly he and Pierre crossed the square and sauntered on in the direction of the Hotel de la Marine. They were bound, Jean told somebody, for General Humbert's birthday party.

New Orleans gasped and then broke into delighted chuckles. That was their Jean Lafitte! Just now under arrest, still out on bond, his name linked with a foul deed of piracy, he snapped his fingers at his enemies by ap-

pearing in the city's very heart as calmly as though birthday parties were far and away his most serious concern in life!

And at the birthday dinner he continued his cool arrogance. It developed into a ribald affair—General Humbert, once a leader for Napoleon, was a fire-eater and a man of rough-and-ready tastes. He had invited to the celebration of his fifty-seventh birthday anniversary not only his friends among New Orleans' business men and politicians but also such kindred spirits as Dominique You, Beluche, Gambi, and others of their stripe. It was a notable dinner, and it was washed down with notable wines.

Finally, late in the evening, a guest made a particularly vulgar speech. General Humbert, well in his cups, suddenly gave way to bitter anger and remorse.

"Once I was a great soldier," he shouted. "Now you remind me that my associates are—outlaws and pirates! I will not stay among you——"

The dining-room burst into uproar. Snarls of anger gave instant way to danger of riot and bloodshed.

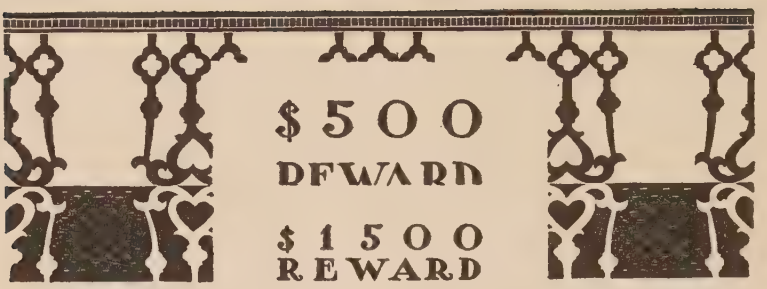
But Jean Lafitte—certainly one of those at whom the red-nosed general was directing his recriminations—stepped to the man's side and swept the room with icy eyes. A quick silence fell. General Humbert hesitated,

grew calmer. Then, abruptly, anger left him and he bowed his head on Lafitte's tall shoulder.

And so the second dramatic incident of the day, with Jean Lafitte as central figure, closed. Both incidents emphasized vividly the man's pride and his power, and they left a permanent imprint on the minds of New Orleans' citizenry. Lafitte was more than ever the darling of the city.

When an official report was made on the "piracy" of the *Independence*, it declared that the vessel had been carrying a cargo of slaves illegally. The names of the Lafittes and the Baratarians appeared nowhere in the report. And New Orleans, perhaps with a mischievous hope that its hero were not so guiltless as the report indicated, chuckled delightedly:

"—That man Lafitte!"



CHAPTER XI

A PAIR OF REWARDS

Four days after this brilliant Sunday Captain Holmes appeared in district court and told his tale of the occurrence of November 16th. For some reason, however, the formal charge against Jean Lafitte, based on Holmes's evidence, was not recorded until mid-spring of 1813. The charge recited again, in stiff legal language, the story of that November night, and asked the court "that the same Jean Lafitte be duly cited to appear and answer the plaint, and that judgment may be rendered against him in favor of the said United States for the aforesaid sum of $12,014.52, with costs of the suit," etc., etc.

Charges were laid against Pierre as well as Jean, and in the course of the next few months six writs against them were issued directing United States marshals to produce

them in court. But none of these writs was ever served. The brothers Lafitte cannily remained out of reach of officers charged with their arrest. Besides, said New Orleans rumor, the officers weren't wasting much energy in searching for the Lafittes! So their bonds were forfeited and, after the sixth writ, the matter was allowed to sink out of sight.

Meantime, smuggling operations were proceeding with greater success than ever. Regular convoys were established, conducting pirogues and sailboats loaded with contraband up to New Orleans by the Barataria route or to Donaldsonville through Bayou Lafourche. A third route was being followed, this one using Last Island, some sixty miles west of Grande Terre along the coast, as its Gulf base and running up the famous Bayou Teche into the "Evangeline country" where the Cajun rice planters had settled. Here and along Bayou Lafourche the Lafitte traders dealt directly with the plantation owners whose great tall-columned homes dotted the shores—a quicker and more convenient method than trading through "middlemen" in the cities.

The oak-covered shell mound just north of Lake Barataria known as the Temple was becoming a more and more popular rendezvous for merchants and planters, too. Kaffles of slaves taken from the blackbirders of the Gulf—traders who, because their own trade was illegal,

could not get legal redress for robberies committed against them by privateer or pirate—came up here and went on the auction block at good prices. Spices, ivory, silks—treasures from South America and China, Africa and India—all might be had at these smugglers' sales. And the Lafittes prospered and grew arrogant.

But Governor Claiborne was neither discouraged nor propitiated by that one abortive arrest. On March 15th he had issued a new proclamation to his people:

> Whereas, I have received information that upon, or near the shores of Lake Barataria, within the limits and jurisdiction of this State, a considerable number of banditti, comprised of individuals of different nations, have armed and equipped several vessels for the avowed purpose of cruising on the high seas, and committing depredations and piracies on the vessels of nations in peace with the United States, and carrying on an illicit trade in goods, wares, and merchandise with the inhabitants of this state . . . I have thought proper to issue this my proclamation, hereby commanding the persons engaged as aforesaid in such unlawful acts to cease therefrom, and forthwith to disperse and separate; and I do charge and require all officers, civil and military, in this State, each within his respective district, to be vigilant and active in apprehending and securing every individual engaged . . . in the violation of the laws; and I do caution the people of this State against holding any intercourse . . . with such high

> offenders; and I do also earnestly exhort each and every good citizen to afford help, protection, and support to the officers . . . and to rescue Louisiana from the foul reproach which would attach to her character, should her shores afford any asylum, or her citizens countenance, to an association of individuals whose practices are so subversive of all laws. . . .

Claiborne was not sanguine about the results of this proclamation. Two days later he wrote to General Wilkinson: "I do not expect that the proclamation will induce these lawless men to disperse and separate; but I trust and believe it may tend to excite the vigilance of the officers and to prevent the citizens from countenancing such violations. As regards the principal offenders . . . force is in my opinion indispensable, and . . . I hope you may find it convenient to the service to send without delay to Barataria a detachment sufficiently strong to disperse the banditti."

But Wilkinson lacked either the strength or the desire. He did nothing. At one time or another, it is true, the national government had attempted feeble expeditions against the Baratarians. But, mysteriously, the smugglers always were warned in advance. When the government forces arrived at Grande Terre or the Temple or Last Island they always found a deserted encampment. And always, within a few days after the forces withdrew,

operations were under way with renewed vigor.

On June 23rd there had come an attack from another quarter. Lafitte privateers must have been charged with forays against British commerce in the Gulf; for on that date an English sloop-of-war appeared near the mouth of Bayou Lafourche and sent a boatload of marines to attack the smugglers.

Two privateers were at anchor off Cat Island, and these the Britishers attacked with more courage than common sense. The privateers' forces were much the larger, and the marines were beaten back with heavy losses. The British withdrew to their sloop, and away she sailed.

But if General Wilkinson and the Legislature of Louisiana could do nothing, the collector of customs, Thomas H. Williams, was at last forced to action. On October 14th a small force of dragoons under a revenue officer, Walter Gilbert, surprised a smuggling party with Jean Lafitte as its leader almost on the threshold of New Orleans. Lafitte had said, "I prefer losing my life rather than my goods." On this occasion he showed his sincerity, for his party met the dragoons' attack fiercely. The officers gained control of the smugglers' boat and its cargo; but a driving counter-attack followed. One of Gilbert's men was wounded, and the rest were routed.

So, on November 24th, Governor Claiborne took what he meant for a decisive step. In a proclamation that day he

declared that smuggling had of late decidedly increased. He retold the tale of the fight with Gilbert, and of the failure of officers to execute the order for Jean Lafitte's arrest—"such is the countenance and protection afforded him, or the terror excited by the threats of himself and his associates." And he concluded:

> I do solemnly caution all and singular the citizens of the State against giving any kind of succor to the said Jean Lafitte and his associates, but to be aiding and abetting in arresting him and them, and all others in like manner offending; and do furthermore, in the name of the State, offer a reward of $500, which will be paid out of the treasury to any person delivering the said Jean Lafitte to the Sheriff of the Parish of Orleans, or to any other Sheriff in the State, so that the said Jean Lafitte may be brought to justice.

New Orleans sat up at this. A reward on his head? That might actually frighten the man. Coffee houses buzzed. But two days later they roared with laughter.

The Governor's proclamation had been posted in prominent places about the city. On November 26th appeared a second proclamation, this one signed by Jean Lafitte. And in language as heavily legal as the Governor's it offered a reward of $1500—no paltry $500!—for the arrest and delivery at Grande Terre of no other than Governor William Charles Cole Claiborne!

CHAPTER XII

JAIL!

Jean Lafitte was hugely pleased by the success of his insolent reply to Claiborne. Down at Grande Terre in December he chuckled silently, and Pierre's sides shook with deep laughter, over its reception by their friends in New Orleans. Every customer who visited them told them, in huge glee, about it. And Jean's respect for Claiborne and his puny attempts at law enforcement dropped another notch.

In his assurance Lafitte decided on another insult. He was planning a big sale at the Temple for January 20th; and just after the first of the year there appeared in the cafés, around the Place d'Armes and posted on buildings of New Orleans hundreds of handbills advertising the sale. Four hundred fifteen prime slaves would be offered at auction, said the bills. Moreover, a large supply of imported goods of high quality would be put on the block.

Again French New Orleans quivered with delight. Not only did this man outwit and outmaneuver the Governor

at every turn; he even flung his insults openly and brazenly into the face of the authorities! . . . But if the Creoles were delighted, the Virginian ire of Governor Claiborne was thoroughly aroused.

He met in conference with his new customs collector, Dubourg. They had few men available, and repeated appeals to the Legislature and the United States Army for help went unanswered. But they recruited a force of twelve men and put them in charge of a temporary customs inspector, a man named Stout.

"Go to the Temple," said Claiborne grimly. "Arrest the Lafittes if you can. But at any cost prevent that auction!"

With the courage of a lost cause the little band stationed itself near the shell mound. Its task was hopeless from the start. Sure of the result of his bald announcement, Jean Lafitte arrived at the Temple with his slaves, his contraband merchandise, and a well-armed, hard-faced convoy of Baratarians, spoiling for a fight.

They found it. Arriving at the Temple, they ran squarely into the muskets of the revenue officers. The battle was as brief as it was bitter. Stout was killed by a musket ball. Two more of the men in his band were dangerously wounded. The remaining ten, overpowered, were made prisoners.

The auction, well attended, was a success. And Jean

Lafitte had another blood-stained plume in his cap, another victory to crow about.

Four days later, on January 24, 1814, news of the debacle reached New Orleans. Collector Dubourg immediately laid before the Governor a full report of the affair, ending his statement thus: "It is high time that these contrabandists, dispersed throughout the State, should be taught to respect our laws, and I hold it my duty to call on your Excellency for a force adequate to the exigency of the case."

Nobody would have liked more than his Excellency the Governor to furnish such a force. And a growing colony of New Orleansites agreed with him—men who, like Claiborne, were bringing to the city American traditions of respect for law and to whom the name of Jean Lafitte did not appear in the aura of romance with which the Creoles surrounded it. But these men were rarely in official positions, and even if they had been there was little they could have accomplished.

For Lafitte was using more weapons than the military against forces sent to harass him. One group of militia, dispatched to break up a smuggling party, was taken captive, transported to Grande Terre, banqueted and entertained, and finally sent back to New Orleans with cartridge pouches laden with precious gifts!

"How," demanded these men and their Louisiana

friends, "could such a man be as bad as the Governor would make him out?"

Determinedly the Governor presented Dubourg's statement and his own plea to the Legislature. Estimating the Baratarians' numbers as somewhere between one hundred and five hundred and adding that their fort on Grande Terre was defended by several pieces of cannon, Claiborne declared that force was the only effective means of ridding Louisiana of the smuggling scourge.

"For," he said, "so numerous and bold are the followers of Lafitte, and, I grieve to say, such is the countenance afforded him by some of our citizens, to me unknown, that all efforts to apprehend this high offender have hitherto been baffled."

The Legislature, instead of acting, appointed a committee! And in the meantime Lafitte was again sending contraband up Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche, again using the winding canals of Barataria, always with strong armed guards, but apparently sure of his ground. The Legislature, lacking funds, postponed organization of the military force Claiborne had so urgently requested.

On March 2nd the Governor again importuned the Legislature. Again he relayed a request from Dubourg for an armed force, and this time he had a definite plan. He wished to raise a body of militia by voluntary enlistment for six months—one hundred men, with one drum-

mer, one fifer, a captain and three lieutenants, would be adequate, he thought. "As this corps will be solely employed in enforcing the laws of the United States, I am persuaded the General Assembly will readily defray any expense," he concluded. "But if in this reasonable expectation we should be disappointed, I would advise that the corps be immediately discharged, for the present embarrassments of our treasury will not admit of its remaining in service at the expense of the State."

Thus Claiborne thought to answer the Legislature's plea of lack of funds. But again he was turned down—something he must by this time have been accustomed to, for the law-making body had just rejected, in quick succession, five of his candidates to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court bench.

So, blocked at every corner, Claiborne tried a new route. He called together a hand-picked Grand Jury, made up largely of New Orleans citizens from the North whose sympathies followed his. They examined dozens of witnesses in dark secrecy, making every effort to keep their proceedings hidden. Few of the stories they heard ever became public; but a characteristic one, told by one Antonio Arcas, reached the newspapers.

Arcas made definite charges. According to formal action he instituted in district court on April 25th, he was

suing to regain possession of goods taken from the Spanish vessel *Louisa Antonio* in May 1813, by an armed hermaphrodite brig said to have been operated by Lafitte men. These goods had been retaken in New Orleans by revenue officers, after they had been smuggled past customs lines.

Other stories were similar to Arcas's. And on the basis of the stories frank charges of piracy were made—the first time that the word "pirate" had been officially leveled at the Lafittes.

In the indictment finally returned in July, two strange names were used. One, "Johnness," was generally thought to be Beluche the other, "Johnnot" or "Johannot," Dominique You. "Johnness" was charged with piracy on the *Santa*, taken nine miles from Grande Isle with a loss of $9000. "Johnnot" was alleged to have taken another Spanish vessel off Trinidad with her $30,000 cargo. And Pierre Lafitte, said the indictment, was "an aider and abettor in these crimes before and after the fact, as one who did upon land, to-wit: in the city of New Orleans, within the district of Louisiana, knowingly and willingly aid, assist, procure, counsel, and advise the said piracies and robberies."

Jean Lafitte, too, was named. And the citizens of New Orleans were adjured to give up smuggling and its en-

couragement—not because smuggling was illegal, but because it was so difficult to establish lawful facts on which convictions might be based!

Once he had procured the indictment, Claiborne lost no time. He sent officers out in a hurry to search the favorite haunts of the smugglers. Uninformed of the new charge against him, Pierre Lafitte was loitering in a street near the Place d'Armes. He was captured without a struggle.

It was but a few steps to the Calabozo, the heavy-walled old Spanish prison built just back of and into the Cabildo. Pierre was hustled there and thrust into heavy chains, then locked up in a cell little better than a dungeon.

This trouble was the worst into which the pursuits of Jean and Pierre Lafitte had yet led them.

CHAPTER XIII

1000 DOLLARS REWARD

JEAN LAFITTE met this brand new problem—Pierre's arrest and imprisonment—with brand new tactics.

Bail was refused. The authorities wished to take no chances, this time, on Pierre's forfeiting a bond and going free. Heavily shackled, he remained in his cell.

"We must have lawyers," Jean told Dominique You, "the best lawyers in Louisiana."

His thoughts turned naturally to John Grymes. Grymes was an intimate—with Grymes Jean had chatted in coffee houses by the hour. He was the United States attorney for the District of Louisiana, and in that capacity would be charged with Pierre's prosecution; but to Jean Lafitte this was no more than a minor obstacle.

He sent word to Grymes to meet him at the cottage of Marie Louise Villars, Pierre's quadroon favorite who had replaced Adelaide Maselari in the elder brother's affections. To the cottage Jean went secretly—he must not be seen. There the two conferred—Grymes the prosecutor and Lafitte the smuggler whom Grymes was expected to put on trial.

For an hour they talked. "I would have to give up my official position," Grymes objected.

"I have thought of that," answered Jean. "Would a fee of twenty thousand dollars compensate you?"

He would need assistance, the lawyer said.

"Yes. A man like Edward Livingston. Twenty thousand dollars for him, too——"

Thus, over brandy and coffee, it was decided. Grymes would resign as district attorney to take the case. He would engage the highly respected Livingston as his colleague. Jean would pay each of them $20,000.

"Livingston and I," boasted Grymes, "can get you out of hell if necessary!"

New Orleans was flabbergasted. Both of the men were Americans—neither had Creole blood. Both were leaders in their profession, both were friends of Claiborne. Grymes was an official, and Livingston, one-time mayor of New York, had formulated the code of procedure used for years in Louisiana law and had played a leading role in the civic and social affairs of territory and state since his arrival in 1803.

Either the two men had been lured into connivance at the smugglers' misdeeds by the huge fees offered them, said New Orleans—or the case of Jean and Pierre Lafitte could not be so bad after all! Piracy was a serious charge,

and there was little enough evidence to support it. Perhaps the Grand Jury had overstepped its mark.

In any case, the reputations of the two were such that their connection with the brothers could not but lighten Lafittean guilt in the public eye. And Grymes's prompt challenge for a duel with his successor in office, when the man declared that Grymes had been "seduced out of the path of honor," was further persuasion.

"Served him properly!" laughed the cafés, when Grymes shot his antagonist in the hip and crippled him.

At once the two lawyers set to work. But they were facing as thick a stone wall as those which kept Pierre cooped up in the Calabozo. As they tried this means and that for liberating the elder Lafitte and as they laid plans for his defense should he come to trial, they warned Jean to avoid arrest himself. So, for the first time in years, the tall figure of the man was no longer seen strolling in the Place d'Armes. Sometimes he visited New Orleans; more often he confined himself to Donaldsonville and other outlying villages. Always his movements were veiled and furtive.

When everything else had failed, Grymes and Livingston tried to procure relief for Pierre on the ground of ill health. The shackles he wore, his inactivity, his confinement in a dark cell all were injurious to him, they said.

But the court appointed two physicians to investigate, and their report on August 10th proclaimed that "the lowness of spirit from agitation of mind appears to be the only indisposition he labors under." So Pierre remained in chains in his cell.

Even though their efforts were ineffective, however, neither they nor Jean Lafitte proposed that they should not be paid.

"I will bring your fees in gold to New Orleans if you wish," Jean told them. "But I should be honored if you would visit me at Grande Terre to receive them."

To Livingston this invitation did not appeal. But to Grymes, adventurous and pleasure-loving, it was an opportunity not to be missed. He accepted with alacrity.

And Livingston, with a twinkle in his eye even though his square jaw set firmly, gave his fellow counselor a commission.

"Grymes," he said, "you're a well-known scapegrace, and you have nothing to fear from those congenial spirits at Barataria. But as for me, they might hang me for being so different from you and them. So I'm going to make you my representative, and as remuneration for your trouble I will give you ten percent of my fee if you bring it to me."

"Agreed!" returned Grymes. And off he went.

He spent a week on Grande Terre, and a notable week

it was. There was feasting and entertainment, and there was all the gaming Grymes desired. Legend says there was too much—that he lost in gambling most of the gold he received from the hands of Jean Lafitte.

At any rate, he returned to New Orleans lavish in his praises of his hosts. They had even put him and his gold and silver in a fine yawl and furnished him a convoy part way to the city, he reported.

"What a cruel misnomer it is," he said, with a solemnity belied by his smile, "to call the most honest and polished gentlemen the world ever produced bandits and pirates!"

Meantime, Claiborne and New Orleans had other distractions. A party of enthusiasts, with General Humbert as a leader, had planned in March an invasion of Texas with a view of overthrowing Spanish rule there. Claiborne, under instructions from Washington, had to frustrate those plans. He had on his hands a continuous quarrel with his Legislature; he could get no help in subduing the Baratarians, he could get no appropriations for raising the militia demanded by the federal government until he resorted to extreme threats. Moreover, he could not persuade Louisianians to join the militia, and he was becoming so unpopular that by midsummer he feared impeachment proceedings might be invoked against him.

More important than internal disorders, however, were

ominous rumblings from without. The United States' war with England was not going well. The American army was gaining victories in Canada and New York State, but late in August General Ross's British army occupied Washington and destroyed the Capitol. On March 27th General Andrew Jackson had defeated the Creek Indians, roused against the United States by British and Spanish emissaries, in a battle in the South, and had thus averted one threat against New Orleans.

But disturbing news came to Louisiana from the Gulf. The British fleet was blockading American ports, and it was not safe for an American vessel to weigh anchor. New Orleans' trade was at a standstill. And British vessels had arrived in the Gulf with the hope of inflaming the Indians again and attacking Fort Bowyer, at Mobile, Alabama, to make it a base for operations against Louisiana.

Late in August Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Nicholls of the British artillery established a base at Pensacola, Florida—then Spanish territory—to carry out this purpose. On August 29th he issued a proclamation, addressed variously to "natives of Louisiana" and "men of Kentucky," in which he called on these American citizens to assist in liberating their paternal soil from "a faithless, imbecile government." This document, assuring its readers of an Indian alliance, attempted to persuade them of

the certain success of Britain's army, now freed from war in Europe by Napoleon's abdication, and to lead them to change their flag before the blow should fall.

So New Orleans was definitely in danger, and Claiborne was near hysteria. He wrote to Jackson and to Washington demanding aid and expressing his fears that Louisiana's citizens might not prove as loyal as he would wish.

Perhaps it was the excitement attendant on this new menace that led New Orleans officials to laxity in watching the chain-laden Pierre Lafitte. For, when the jailers went to inspect his cell on the morning of September 5th, they found the door open and the cell empty.

How he escaped remained a mystery. His chains had not been lightened and his cell door was securely bolted. But it was a ground floor cell, opening on the center court of the Cabildo. Once out of it, it was no trick for Pierre to make his way through a door leading into the Cabildo's main hall and thence to the street.

Jean Lafitte himself had no active part in the jail delivery, even though he may have planned it. He himself was busy at Grande Terre just then with matters of far greater moment.

In the tri-weekly Louisiana *Courier* of September 7th appeared the following notice, to be repeated in each issue for several weeks:

1000 DOLLARS REWARD

WILL be paid for the apprehending of *PIERRE LAFITTE*, who broke and escaped last night from the prison of the parish. Said Pierre Lafitte is about 5 feet 10 inches high, stout made, light complexion, and somewhat cross-eyed, further description is considered unnecessary as he is very well known in this city.

Said Lafitte took with him three Negroes, to wit—Sam, formerly the property of M. Sawza, Ceasar the property of Mr. Pierre Lefebvre, and Hamilcar the property of Mr. Jarnais. The above reward will be paid to any person delivering the said Lafitte to the subscriber, and fifty dollars for each of the Negroes.

New Orleans, September 5, 1814

J. H. Holland,
Keeper of the Prison.

Though the notice appeared frequently in the *Courier*, nobody came forward to claim the reward.

CHAPTER XIV

AN OFFER FROM THE BRITISH

EVEN though Pierre had been in jail and British men-of-war were dotting the Gulf with their sails, Jean Lafitte had not permitted his business to wane. Hurrying from Barataria Bay to Donaldsonville or the Temple and back again, he saw to it that privateers continued to bring in prizes, that smuggling kept on and that frequent auctions were held.

Early in September he happened to be at his Grande Terre home. At dawn on the morning of September 3rd he was awakened abruptly by a hail, relayed from the lookout who always watched the sea.

"Sail ho!"

"What sail?"

"British sloop, sir. She's anchored five miles off the pass——"

Lafitte's mind flashed to that attack on his privateers off Cat Island the year before. Was this to be a repetition? But the messenger's next words answered this question.

"A boat is coming ashore, sir. She's headed for the pass."

The British could not be so foolish as to attempt an attack on his fortified position with a small boat. Lafitte gave an order at once.

"Get a boat and crew ready. I will go to meet her."

Just outside the pass the two boats came within hailing distance. A sharp contrast they made.

For the men in the British pinnace were immaculately uniformed, from the three officers in her stern to the dozen sailors manning her oars. Two of the officers wore the dress of the British navy; the third was in the flaming red of his Majesty's army.

There was not a uniform in the Baratarians' boat. The crew was a mixed lot—men with the pigtails that so many sailors wore, men with brilliant handkerchiefs on their heads, men in the short roundabout or jacket of the day, hairy-chested men naked to the waist. . . . And the tall, silent man in black broadcloth in the stern looked like no commander of a thousand privateers.

A flag of truce fluttered at the pinnace's mast, and one of her officers answered readily to Lafitte's hail:

"What boat is that?"

"His Majesty's sloop *Sophia*, Captain Lockyer. Are you from Mr. Lafitte?"

Lafitte was cautious. What was their business?

"We are," he answered shortly. "Have you a message for him?"

Captain Nicholas Lockyer, spokesman for the boat, replied that he and Captain McWilliams, of the army, bore a packet of letters addressed to Jean Lafitte. Would the Baratarians deliver them?

"Certainly," responded Lafitte, his thoughts flashing. The object of this visit—from the rank of the officers it must be an important one—was still concealed. He sparred for time.

"May I have the letters?" he asked. With no hesitation Captain Lockyer passed to him a little bundle of four officially sealed papers. Then he spoke again.

"Mr. Lafitte would be honored to have you as his guests on the island," he declared formally. "Will you not come ashore?"

Apparently this suited the Britishers. Lockyer, McWilliams, and the third officer, a naval lieutenant, conferred briefly; then Lockyer accepted the invitation, and the two boats headed in through the pass.

There were vessels at anchor in the bay, and the small boats rowed silently until they were well among them, near the shore. The Britishers were within Lafitte's power. He rose in the boat as it approached the landing.

"I am Jean Lafitte," he announced dramatically. "My home is open to you."

If the British officers were surprised or suspicious at his revelation, they concealed it. With the purpose of the

call still undisclosed, the group—Lafitte and the three officers—went up the island to his home. The Frenchman was punctilious in his courtesy.

"Before we open the letters," he asked, "shall we not have breakfast?"

And so, while the Englishmen marveled, he had served such a meal as they had least thought to find in this lonely spot. The foods were choice, the wines old and fine, the cigars Cuba's best. And Lafitte gave orders for courteous treatment of the pinnace's crew, too—orders that were carried out despite ominous mutterings and evil glances from some of the men. These smugglers, few of them of British blood, bore England no love. And had it not been a British crew that had attacked their vessels a year before?

Nevertheless, everything went smoothly. At length the meal was finished, and Jean Lafitte turned to the packet of letters.

The first, he found, was a copy of the proclamation issued to "natives of Louisiana" by Colonel Nicholls on August 29. He read it gravely. Still the object of the visit was veiled. His eyelid came down in that quizzical wink; he opened the second letter.

This, too, was signed by Colonel Nicholls. But it was addressed directly to "Mr. Lafitte, or commandant at

Barataria"; and Lafitte found it to contain a direct and astounding offer:

Sir:

I have arrived in the Floridas for the purpose of annoying the only enemy Great Britain has in the world, as France and England are now friends. I call on you, with your brave followers, to enter into the service of Great Britain, in which you shall have the rank of captain. Lands will be given to you all, in proportion to your respective ranks, on a peace taking place, and I invite you on the following terms:

Your property shall be guaranteed to you, and your persons protected—in return for which I ask you to cease all hostilities against Spain, or the allies of Great Britain—your ships and vessels to be placed under the orders of the commanding officer on this station, until the commander-in-chief's pleasure is known; but I guarantee their full value, at all events. I herewith enclose you a copy of my proclamation to the inhabitants of Louisiana, which will, I trust, point out to you the honorable intentions of my Government. You may be a useful assistant to me in forwarding them; therefore, if you determine, lose no time. The bearer of this, Captain McWilliams, will satisfy you on any other point you may be anxious to learn, as will Captain Lockyer, of the *Sophia*, who brings him to you. We have a powerful reinforcement on its way here, and I hope to cut out some other work for the Americans

than oppressing the inhabitants of Louisiana. Be expeditious in your resolves, and rely on the verity of your humble servant. . . .

Astounding enough, this offer—and promising, if a bit vague and high-flown. Threatening, too: Colonel Nicholls all but said he was planning an attack on Louisiana.

But Jean Lafitte wanted more information before he could "determine." He turned to the third paper, a set of instructions from Sir William Henry Percy to Captain Lockyer. Sir William was senior British officer in the Gulf, then stationed aboard his ship, the *Hermes*, at Pensacola. In the letter he directed Lockyer to proceed to Grande Terre and make the offers to Lafitte as outlined in Nicholls's letter. And he concluded:

In the event of their not being inclined to act offensively against the United States you will do all in your power to persuade them to a strict neutrality, and still endeavor to put a stop in their hostilities against Spain. Should you succeed completely in the object for which you are sent, you will concert such measures for the annoyance of the enemy as you judge best from circumstances; having an eye to the junction of their small armed vessels with me for the capture of Mobile, &c.

And the fourth, continuing the instructions to Nicholls, was more direct and more determined in tone.

> Having understood that some British merchantmen have been detained, taken, and sold by the inhabitants of Barataria, I have directed Captain Lockyer of his Majesty's sloop *Sophia* to proceed to that place and inquire into the circumstances with positive orders to demand instant restitution, and in case of refusal to destroy to his utmost every vessel there as well as to carry destruction over the whole place and at the same time to assure him of the co-operation of all his Majesty's naval forces on this station. I trust at the same time that the inhabitants of Barataria, consulting their own interest, will not make it necessary to proceed to such extremities—I hold out at the same time a war instantly destructive to them; and on the other hand should they be inclined to assist Great Britain in her just and unprovoked war against the United States, the security of their property, the blessings of the British constitution—and should they be inclined to settle on this continent, lands will at the conclusion of the war be allotted to them in his Majesty's colonies in America. In return for all these concessions on the part of Great Britain, I expect that the directions of their armed vessels will be put into my hands (for which they will be remunerated), the instant cessation of hostilities against the Spanish government, and the restitution of any undisposed property of that nation.

> Should any inhabitants be inclined to volunteer their services into his Majesty's forces either naval or military for limited services, they will be received; and if any British subject, being at Barataria, wishes to return to his native country, he will, on joining his Majesty's service, receive a free pardon.

Jean Lafitte finished reading the last page, looked up. Three pairs of British eyes were burning eagerly at him. He half smiled.

"Well?" demanded Lockyer, unable to restrain himself.

Lafitte still hesitated. Then:

"It is a remarkable proposition. But——"

Captain McWilliams broke in eagerly, and the rest joined arguments with his. The proposal gave the Baratarians everything to gain—they said—and nothing to lose. A captaincy in the British navy . . . full pay for his ships, lands for his lands. . . .

"You are already at war with America. You yourself are French, and so of course a friend of England. Your brother Pierre is this moment in prison. And as England is ready for an attack on Louisiana, and as we expect to find no opposition from the French, the Spanish, or the Negroes, whom we are going to free and rouse to insurrection—it will obviously be to your advantage to join us."

Again there was a pause, and again the British waited anxiously for their host's reply. It came deliberately.

"A handsome proposition," Lafitte repeated. "But—a few days for reflection——"

Captain McWilliams attempted to dismiss this with a wave of the hand.

"Such a proposal," he said, "would seem to me hardly a matter demanding reflection. But let me add that we are especially desirous of an alliance with you because you and your men can serve as guides to the bayous of Louisiana, and so expedite our attack on New Orleans——"

There it was—confirmation of Lafitte's suspicion that an attack was being planned! But neither by look nor word did the solemn black-clad privateer leader show surprise. McWilliams, far from realizing that he had given Lafitte the information for which he had been angling, hurried on.

"We are authorized to say that you would have, at the very least, a fair prospect of promotion; and, finally, that we will pay you the sum of thirty thousand dollars if your decision is favorable—thirty thousand dollars payable either at Pensacola or New Orleans, as you wish."

By now it was well into the afternoon, and the officers were becoming a little impatient. But Lafitte was not to be hurried. He had amazing information, and he needed

time to digest it. What would not the authorities in New Orleans give for that knowledge—knowledge that the dreaded attack on the city was knocking at their door. . . .

"Gentlemen," said Jean Lafitte, "your plan seems almost perfect." It seemed a favorable answer, and the English were awaiting his immediate acceptance. "But I must consult one of my advisers, who is aboard his vessel in the bay. Will you excuse me?"

Surprised, the officers could not object. They stood on the veranda and watched a small boat pull away for a schooner in the harbor, Lafitte sitting inscrutably in the stern.

"The man received the offer without changing the expression of his face," Lockyer wrote to a friend, "and I felt assured of his final acceptance."

But as soon as the Baratarians' commander was beyond earshot trouble burst out. The men on the island were far from satisfied. With unsuspected loyalty to the United States, they felt that the British were spies. Perhaps they knew that a British officer in disguise had already spent some time in New Orleans. Murmurings and mutterings which had simmered all day broke into open cries.

"Hang the spies! Throw them in irons!"

The three officers retreated to the inside of the house

as the shouts came to their ears. But the men were not to be stopped. With threats and curses they flooded into the house and took the British prisoners. Without ceremony, quite regardless of the flag of truce under which the boatload of men had arrived, they threw the officers and their crew into the Grande Terre guardhouse, there to await Lafitte's return. Their purpose, they told the Englishmen, was to turn them over to authorities in New Orleans as spies.

Lafitte, however, had other plans. He did not tell his men what had passed in his conference; but he told them many other things.

"These men came to us confident of our honor," he declared. "Are we the kind of men who violate a flag of truce?"

He pointed out, too, that by following out the plan which the men urged they would lose the opportunity of discovering the extent of the British projects against Louisiana. He had no easy task to quiet the anger of his men, to make his will felt; he spent the entire night at it, while the Britishers languished in confinement.

But at length he had his way. Early in the morning of September 4th the officers and their crew were released, and embarked in their pinnace to return to the *Sophia*. And still Lafitte gave them no conclusive answer.

"To decide so important a question I must have time," he said. "Come back in two weeks and I will give you my decision."

So the British boat pulled away, its officers still ignorant of Jean Lafitte's intention. And perhaps that night—the night of Pierre's escape from the Calabozo—he did not know himself.

CHAPTER XV

"I AM AN AMERICAN"

But he did not delay long in making up his mind.

There were a thousand considerations. The British offer had its attractions. A British commission was not to be sneered at; the British concentration on Louisiana seemed sure of success. Louisiana had been no friend to the Lafittes, officially, even if it had made of Jean an unofficial hero. And there was an increasing chance that Claiborne's insistence on breaking up the smugglers' colony would reach fruition, for he had recently received promise of aid from the federal government.

Yet Jean Lafitte said just one thing to himself.

"I am a Louisianian and an American."

Other arguments faded. In spite of what he considered his persecution, in spite of his French birth and his mockery of customs laws, he had adopted the United States as his country.

Besides, the $30,000 offer didn't mean much to a man who was able at will to pay out $40,000 in attorneys' fees! And as for Pierre's imprisonment—Jean knew that at that very moment secret efforts which would soon free his brother were under way.

Captain Lockyer and his brother officers were hardly out of sight, then, before Jean had sat down at the fine mahogany secretary in his Grande Terre home to write a letter. He addressed it to John Blanque, French-American member of the Legislature—a man in whose integrity and trust Jean had perfect faith:

> Though proscribed by my adopted country, I will never let slip any occasion of serving her or of proving that she has never ceased to be dear to me. Of this you will see here a convincing proof. Yesterday, September 3rd, there appeared here, under a flag of truce, a boat coming from an English brig, at anchor about two leagues from the pass. Mr. Nicholas Lockyer, a British officer of high rank, delivered me the following papers: two directed to me, a proclamation, and the admiral's

instructions to that officer, all herewith enclosed. You will see from their contents the advantages I might have derived from that kind of association.

I may have evaded the payment of duties to the custom house; but I have never ceased to be a good citizen; and all the offenses I have committed I was forced to by certain vices in our laws. In short, sir, I make you the depository of the secret on which perhaps depends the tranquillity of our country; please to make such use of it as your judgment may direct. I might expatiate on this proof of patriotism but I let the fact speak for itself.

Then follow two paragraphs in which he pointed out that the enemy attempted to work on his sympathies "by a motive which few men would have resisted"—the plight of his brother Pierre. The proof of his loyalty, he added, should persuade authorities to treat Pierre with special consideration. And he concluded:

I have asked fifteen days to determine, assigning such plausible pretexts that I hope the term will be granted. I am waiting for the British officer's answer, and for yours to this.

He sealed the letter, with the packet given him by the British, and dispatched the precious parcel by special messenger to New Orleans. Then he announced his ac-

tion to his men, and—says a historian of the time—"the alluvial delta of Barataria was shaken by their loud huzzas!"

Next he wrote a second letter, this one to Captain Lockyer. Blandly deceitful, this letter—but perfectly justified, Lafitte felt, since it helped along his plan:

> The confusion which prevailed in our camp yesterday and this morning, and of which you have a complete knowledge, has prevented me from answering in a precise manner to the object of your mission; nor even at this moment can I give you all the satisfaction that you desire; however, if you could grant me a fortnight, I would be entirely at your disposal at the end of that time—this delay is indispensable to send away three persons who alone occasioned all the disturbance —the two who were the most troublesome are to leave this place in eight days, and the other is to go to town—the remainder of the time is necessary to enable me to put my affairs in order. You may communicate with me, in sending a boat to the eastern point of the pass, where I will be found. You have inspired me with more confidence than the admiral, your superior officer, could have done himself; with you alone I wish to deal, and from you also I will claim, in due time, the reward of the service which I may render to you.

These letters on their way, Lafitte had nothing to do but await an answer from New Orleans. Two days, he

thought, should be enough time—twelve hours each way, twenty-four for Blanque to take his disclosures to the proper authorities.

The next morning Pierre appeared—a little wan from his confinement, but not a very sick man in spite of the protestations of Jean and the two lawyers. Jean told him at once of the British offer, and Pierre approved completely his brother's action. The two set themselves anxiously, impatiently to wait for word.

Meantime, in New Orleans, John Blanque had wasted no time in going to Governor Claiborne with the messages. And Claiborne, recognizing as did Blanque the extreme gravity of the situation, was in a quandary. Was Jean Lafitte to be trusted? Now that Pierre had escaped, was there still reason for Jean to offer his help to American authorities? And could Claiborne, with dignity, accept aid from a band of men he had so frequently called outlaws?

It was too big a question for him to handle alone. He called a conference—Major-General Jacques Villere and Colonel George T. Ross of the United States Army and Commodore Daniel T. Patterson of the Navy were the leaders. To these men Claiborne read the letters and outlined the situation. Then he asked two questions:

"Are these letters and papers genuine, gentlemen, or has Lafitte forged them? And if they are genuine, should

we enter into dealings with a privateer whom we have proscribed?"

For hours the four argued. At length the committee officially answered in the negative to both questions. General Villere, a Creole, disagreed—he had confidence in Lafitte's honor. Claiborne was inclined to favor Villere's position. But the two were outvoted, and the committee's decision was to ignore the Lafitte communication.

There was another element in the decision. Ross and Patterson were just then completing plans for the most pretentious expedition yet sent out against the Baratarian colony. They believed their venture would succeed. If it did, it might mean great personal gain for them, for the vessels and the merchandise they hoped to confiscate could be claimed as their private prizes. They did not care to give up their plans at this late date; rather they urged hastening the time of departure.

So the second day passed on Grande Terre without reply. Jean Lafitte realized that Claiborne and others might doubt his word; when three days had passed without an answer, he sat down at his desk again. Still his tone was conciliatory and his manner unruffled.

One of the two letters he wrote on September 7th, to Blanque, offered new evidence—an anonymous communication from Havana which had fallen into his hands, giving information about British plans against Louisiana.

Again he avowed his "devotedness to the good of the country." And he went on:

> Since the departure of the officer who came with the flag of truce, his ship, with two other ships of war, have remained on the coast, within sight. Doubtless this point is considered as important. We have hitherto kept on a respectable defensive; if, however, the British attach to the possession of this place the importance they give us room to suspect they do, they may employ means above our strength.

His second letter, addressed to Governor Claiborne, opened with delicate flattery of the state's chief official. Then it went on:

> I offer to you to restore to this state several citizens who, perhaps, in your eyes, have lost that sacred title. I offer you them, however, as you would wish to find them—ready to exert their utmost efforts in defense of the country. This point of Louisiana which I occupy is of great importance in the present crisis. I tender my services to defend it; and the only reward I ask is that a stop be put to the proscription against me and my adherents, by an act of oblivion for all that has been done hitherto. I am the stray sheep wishing to return to the sheepfold. If you were thoroughly acquainted with the nature of my offenses, I should appear to you much less guilty, and still worthy to discharge the duties of a good citizen. I have never sailed under any

flag but that of the Republic of Cartagena, and my vessels are perfectly regular in that respect. If I could have brought my lawful prizes into the ports of this state, I should not have employed the illicit means which caused me to be proscribed. I decline saying more on the subject until I have the honor of your Excellency's answer, which I am persuaded can be dictated only by wisdom.

Should your answer not be favorable to my ardent desires, I declare to you that I will instantly leave the country, to avoid the imputation of having co-operated toward an invasion on this point, which cannot fail to take place, and to rest secure in the acquittal of my own conscience.

Lafitte did not dispatch these letters at once. Instead he waited for three days, burning with impatience, in the hope that word would come from Claiborne. But still no answer came to Grande Terre. On September 10th Pierre Lafitte, coolly ignoring the fact that he was a fugitive, wrote to Blanque the last letter in this remarkable correspondence:

On my arrival here I was informed of all the occurrences that have taken place; I think I may justly commend my brother's conduct under such difficult circumstances. I am persuaded he could not have made a better choice than in making you the depository of the papers that were sent to us and which may be of great importance to the State. Being fully determined to

follow the plan that may reconcile us with the government, I herewith send you a letter directed to his Excellency the Governor, which I submit to your discretion, to deliver or not, as you may think proper. I have not yet been honored with an answer from you. The moments are precious; pray send me an answer that may serve to direct my measures in the circumstances in which I find myself.

There could now be little doubt of the brothers' sincerity. Jean not only offered his aid; he added another assurance that he would never oppose the American flag in any matter beyond his operations as a smuggler. Probably he knew that at that very time a powerful expedition against Grande Terre was being fitted out. But later events bore out the honesty of his promise that he would "instantly leave the country."

So the men waited. They waited in vain. In New Orleans, instead of replying to the Lafittes, Colonel Ross and Commodore Patterson rushed their preparations to attack the privateers. One September 11th—the day the last three letters reached New Orleans—their force was ready to sail.

And Jean Lafitte, waiting in his fortified home, received not the answer from Claiborne that his offer was to be accepted but in its place a report from his spies that a vigorous offensive was about to start.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLOODLESS BATTLE OF GRANDE TERRE

Commodore Patterson's plans were complete by the night of September 10th. Early next morning he and Colonel Ross took seventy men from the Forty-Fourth United States Infantry, the regiment of regulars now stationed under Ross at New Orleans for the city's protection, and embarked on three barges for the slow trip down the Mississippi.

Twenty-four hours later the barges were met by the armed schooner *Carolina*, and next day the party made La Balize, the port near the river's mouth, there to join six small gunboats. An imposing force it had grown to be—one well able to face the colony at Grande Terre.

On the evening of September 15th the *Carolina* and the gunboats sailed from the southwest pass of the Mississippi delta and made for Barataria Bay. Early next morning Grande Terre was sighted; at 8.30 the little fleet was outside the pass, and the *Carolina* hoisted to her maintruck a signal flag:

"Clear for action!"

For already Patterson had seen a number of vessels in the harbor, some of them flying Cartagenian colors. No question about these—they were Lafitte's boats!

Then followed a comedy of jockeying back and forth which ended without the firing of a single shot. First Lafitte ordered his ten vessels into battle line across the harbor's mouth. He was not sure of the character of these visitors—they might be British, for they had not yet shown their colors, and if they were they had come to carry out the threat to destroy the entire colony. His men were at quarters, their guns were loaded, tampions pulled from the pieces' ugly snouts, matches lighted. If these were British, they would find a royal American welcome for them!

Then Patterson drew up his fighting line, six gunboats and two smaller but heavily armed vessels, ready to make a run for the pass. The *Carolina* drew too much water—she did not dare attempt it. But she unfurled an American flag, and at once Lafitte's plan changed.

For on board a schooner at the fort he ran up an American flag of his own, and with it a white flag. He had said he would not fight the United States, and he meant to keep his word.

Patterson at once hoisted a flag of truce. But in a few minutes he saw smoke coming from two of the biggest schooners inside the harbor—the smugglers had fired them

rather than give them up, even if they wouldn't fight! Angered, Patterson ordered down his white flag. He gave the signal for battle, hoisted a banner bearing the words "Pardon for Deserters" (New Orleans authorities were welcoming the return of former sailors and soldiers to the ranks, even though they were deserters), and commanded his gunboats to proceed.

Straight for the pass they sailed. The first two, ignorant of the channel, went aground. But the next four made it. Triumphantly they slipped into the harbor, ready for battle. But instead of roaring cannon they found fleeing men. Small boats scuttled like water beetles across the smooth surface of the bay as the crews of the smugglers' vessels, privateers and captured prizes alike, obeyed Lafitte's order to run for freedom.

By noon the "battle" of Grande Terre was ended. Patterson's men took possession of six schooners and one felucca as well as a brig which belonged to the Lafitte force, and of two armed schooners under the Cartagenian flag. His small boats gave chase to the fleeing Baratarians and captured nearly a hundred, among them Dominique You. But several times as many, among them Jean and Pierre Lafitte, escaped to the marshes.

Meantime, Colonel Ross and his infantrymen were executing their share in the attack—investment of the island itself. They had as little difficulty as did Patterson. For

the fort, the Lafitte home, and the warehouses were almost deserted. Ross and Patterson nevertheless felt themselves well repaid for their trouble. In the huge warehouse on the island they found half a million dollars' worth of merchandise, among it some taken some time before from a vessel which had sailed from New Orleans and disappeared completely into the blue hazes of the Gulf.

"When I perceived the enemy forming their vessels into a line of battle," Patterson reported later to the Secretary of the Navy, "I felt confident from their number and very advantageous position and their superiority in men that they would have fought me; their not doing so I regret, for had they, I should have been enabled more effectively to destroy or make prisoners of them and their leaders. But it is a subject of great satisfaction to me to have effected the object of my enterprise without the loss of a man."

For a week the Ross-Patterson forces lay at Grande Terre, taking account of their captures. In addition to the merchandise and nine vessels—one schooner had burned to the water's edge—they had twenty pieces of cannon of different calibers. On September 20th they added another armed schooner, the *General Bolivar*, to the list—the *Bolivar* was a privateer which, returning from a cruise with a prize cargo, ran directly into the United States forces and was taken, after a running fight,

by the *Carolina* and the gunboats. And the soldiers completed their task by demolishing the fort and the palmetto-thatched houses, confiscating the cannon, and ruining every building they found. The entire force, with prize vessels and merchandise, left for New Orleans on September 23rd.

Meantime, the British Captain Lockyer had returned to the waters off Grande Terre, failed to receive the signal he expected, and sailed away. Jean and Pierre Lafitte, with a large party of their men, had taken refuge at Lac des Allemands—Germans' Lake—far up Bayou Lafourche. Others of the Baratarians had gone to Last Island. And New Orleans was buzzing busily with new problems.

The city was becoming more and more terrified by the threat of British invasion. News of the British approach to Lafitte and of the rejection of the smuggler's offer to Claiborne had leaked out. Defense forces, limited to a few regulars and an unenthusiastic, untrained militia, were inadequate, and everybody knew it.

On September 15th prominent citizens, under the chairmanship of Edward Livingston, the Lafittean lawyer, had met at Tremoulet's Coffee House and formed a Committee of Public Defense. On September 16th, the very day Patterson had been attacking Grande Terre, there had been a public meeting in the Place d'Armes at which Livingston had harangued his throng of listeners,

urging on them a show of their loyalty to the United States through active co-operation for protection against the British.

His speech was met with cheers and noisy enthusiasm. New Orleans' fidelity to the Union was not to be questioned! . . . The Committee of Public Defense, however, was not reassured by one meeting. A few days later there appeared in the Louisiana *Courier* a second appeal for united protection to hold the vital control of the Mississippi safe for the United States. "Your safety and in a greater degree your prosperity," said the message, "depend on your being irrevocably and faithfully attached to a union with the other States.

"But if there exist among you men base or mad enough to undervalue their duties and true interests, let them tremble at the dreadful evils they will draw upon themselves and upon us, if by their criminal acts or criminal indifference they aid the enterprises of the enemy against our beloved country."

Even in this extremity, however, the city could not forget Jean Lafitte. What would be his attitude now? Could his loyalty to his adopted country survive the destruction of his colony? Would he find means to release Dominique You, his favorite lieutenant (as well as a New Orleans hero), from the Calabozo? Should Ross and Patterson be given the $500,000 worth of merchandise

they had captured? And what did Claiborne think now about this man Lafitte?

Claiborne did not force New Orleans to wonder long about his position. On September 19th he wrote to General Jackson, now at Mobile following the defeat of the British at nearby Fort Bowyer, to report the success of Patterson's expedition in seizing the "ill-begotten treasures of the pirates" and to urge the immediate occupation of the pass, of Grande Terre, and of the Temple. Only thus, Claiborne said, could America be assured that the British would not take possession of such strategic points.

CHAPTER XVII

REDCOATS AT THE DOOR

General Jackson, at Mobile, was not disposed to show leniency toward the Baratarians. Louisiana was in desperate need of protection, but the need was not so extreme, Jackson thought, that the aid of law-breakers was necessary. In an anti-British proclamation from Mobile he said:

"I ask you, Louisianians, can we place any confidence in the honor of men who have courted an alliance with pirates and robbers? Have not these 'noble' Britons—these honorable men, Colonel Nicholls and Captain Percy, the true representatives of their royal master—done this? Have they not made offers to the pirates of Barataria to join them and their holy cause? And have they not dared to insult you by calling on you to associate, as brothers, with

them and these hellish banditti? Confident that any attempt to invade our soil will be repelled, the undersigned calls not upon either pirates or robbers to join him in the glorious cause!"

High-flown language, indeed. And lofty sentiments. But later events led Jackson to change his mind, if in fact the proclamation expressed his true opinions.

In New Orleans Grymes and Livingston had not forgotten their commission to free the Baratarians of charges against them. Immediately after the destruction of the Grande Terre settlement they set to work to prepare a suit to regain for the Lafittes the property confiscated by Ross and Patterson. At the same time the two officers were planning a counter-suit to prove their right to the goods they had taken—a suit which, when it came to trial later, put into legal record a quantity of evidence to prove that the Baratarians were never pirates, since they always conducted their operations as regularly commissioned privateers.

Jean Lafitte, meantime, was flitting all over southern Louisiana. He had fled first to the "German coast," but he did not remain there. He made a fleeting visit to Grande Terre, to learn the extent of the damage done by the American troops. He appeared in Donaldsonville and even in New Orleans, though always in secret.

In New Orleans he met in carefully hidden conferences

with his lawyers, and they laid plans for their suit to recover the privateers' contraband. But they decided that the time was not favorable to trial of the suit, and its opening was delayed. So Livingston took another tack.

On October 24th he dispatched a letter to President Madison to inform the President of the "state of public opinion" in Louisiana. Asking for 4000 men in Louisiana and 6000 in Florida to "secure us against any attack," he went on to his main point:

> A number of privateers, first sailing under the French, afterward under the Cartagenian, flag, have for four years past brought their prizes to the Bay of Barataria. Government having neglected to break up this settlement, they became bold from impunity, and their prizes were openly sold and distributed through the country, and the most respectable inhabitants supplied themselves with Negroes and merchandise from this source. They have lately been broken up, many of them taken, and by the seizure of their papers those who dealt with them are exposed to prosecution. The number of them, as well as their influence, is great.
>
> A general pardon for "offenses against the revenue laws, those made against filling out and serving in foreign privateers, and for acts committed in vessels under the French or Cartagenian flags by vessels resorting to Barataria which might be construed into piracy" would quiet the public mind and add to our maritime strength at least five hundred sailors who have

> embraced that kind of life more from an idea that their commissions were good than from any piratical design. Should there be a rupture with Spain they will be of the greatest service.

Ostensibly Livingston was pleading for an act of pardon which would set at peace the minds of reputable citizens who had traded with the privateers. Actually such an act would also free the privateers themselves of all charges against them. It was a double-action proposal, and the two lawyers and their employer, Lafitte, plumed themselves on its clever phrasing.

Six days later Governor Claiborne wrote to the Attorney-General of the United States a letter of similar tenor. He was, it seems, changing his point of view to fit more closely to that of his Creole constituents. For he explained that smuggling was not considered a crime by many Louisianians. Occasionally, he said, his denunciations of smuggling were met with replies that "my grandfather, or my father, or my husband was, under the Spanish government, a great smuggler, and he was always esteemed an honest man."

And he closed with a request for forbearance of prosecution of all except the leaders. "I think such an act of clemency would be well received. . . . A sympathy for these offenders is certainly felt by many of the Louisianians."

New Orleans's growing fear of the British invasion was doubtless responsible for this change of heart. As the fall wore away, Claiborne became more assured of the loyalty of his constituents—a loyalty he had doubted because of the continual rebuffs given him by the Legislature and by public opinion. But there was obvious need of firmer protection than was then available. James Brown, of the Legislature, had written to the President to ask for eight or ten thousand militia at once—Louisiana and the Mississippi, he said, were of far more importance to the United States than Canada and the St. Lawrence!

At length the government seemed convinced that a crisis truly existed. Militia and regulars from Tennessee and Kentucky were ordered to the South. Jackson wrote letters and proclamations by the bale to stir Louisiana to defensive action.

Early in November, however, he led an expedition against the British at the Spanish port of Pensacola. The expedition was successful, and he was able at last to turn all his attention toward the Mississippi.

Meantime, Claiborne had written him that arrangements had been made to send a hundred men to Grande Terre to "prevent a surprise by the enemy and to prevent a reunion of the smugglers. Bayou Lafourche and other strategic points are also guarded."

On November 10th the Governor made his about-face

complete. He took opportunity on that day, in a message to the Legislature, to laud the loyalty of Louisianians; and though he does not mention the smugglers by name, there is little doubt but that his intention includes them:

> An English commander has dared to make his first call on the Louisianians, and to invite them to outrage the very ashes of their fathers and welcome an English army on their paternal soil. He has added insult to injury, by first inviting us to the desertion of our country, and then by supposing us capable of cowardly displaying at our dwellings a foreign flag as a passport to his protection. I am, however, fully apprised of the profound contempt with which this base address has everywhere been received; and in the patriotic ardor which pervades the State I behold a pledge of its fidelity and devotion to the American Union.

A few days later the fears of New Orleans received new fuel. News came that, in September, twelve to fifteen thousand British soldiers had sailed from Ireland for the Gulf. These men, released from the European wars by the downfall of Napoleon, were seasoned soldiers.

And Jean Lafitte bided his time. Though his forces were scattered, his colony destroyed, his ships taken and many of his men in prison, he did not cease his smuggling operations. Last Island became his chief base, and privateers continued to bring in their prizes.

Word came that Jackson was soon to come to New Orleans himself—he left Mobile on November 21st. Negotiations with Claiborne had proved a failure. Lafitte made new plans.

He would keep himself hidden until the arrival of the American commander. Then, he decided, he would make another attempt. His fidelity to his adopted country was unswerving.

CHAPTER XVIII

"... *FREE AND FULL PARDON*"

General Andrew Jackson rode into New Orleans on the morning of December 2nd.

With an escort of a scant half-dozen officers, this gaunt, steely eyed man with the stiff silver hair had ridden horseback, with hardly a stop for rest, from Mobile. New Orleans was shocked at the appearance of its "savior." He was no fashion plate, this general. His uniform was of his own choosing; it was rumpled and dirty from his hard trip. He was emaciated and weak from a recent illness; he was abrupt, intolerant of any sign of the fear which was engulfing the city.

But with characteristic energy he set to work before he had stopped to rest. The first day he inspected a recently organized company of militia; he conferred with Claiborne and the military authorities; he appointed Edward Livingston, one of the few Louisianians who had known him before, his military secretary; he attended a formal reception. The next day he went to visit Fort St. Philip, on the Mississippi below New Orleans, and Fort

Petites Coquilles—"Fort Little Shells"—on the bayou connecting Lake Pontchartrain and Lake Borgne, north and east of the city. He ordered batteries erected, bayous closed, and forts strengthened.

And before he had been in the city two weeks he had to face the first British attack. A British fleet moved toward Lake Borgne, and five of Jackson's six gunboats met the invaders. In an hour and a half of fighting on December 14th the gunboats were captured, though the Americans lost only 45 men while 300 British perished; and New Orleans' sea defense was almost entirely wiped out. Only the schooner *Carolina*, one gunboat, and a handful of smaller vessels, hastily armed, were left.

Claiborne asked for adjournment of the Legislature, so that every "hand might be raised" to repel the enemy. The law-makers, obstinate and perhaps failing to see the gravity of the situation, refused the request. Jackson promptly rebuked them by proclaiming martial law. "Those who are not for us are against us," he said, "and will be dealt with accordingly."

New Orleans now was in desperate plight. Business was suspended, banks closed. Money was so scarce that silver dollars were cut into pieces to make change. Jackson had little ammunition, less artillery and only a handful of men —Ross's 700 regulars, a thousand untried militia. The reinforcements from the north had not arrived.

And in this crisis Jean Lafitte made another dramatic move.

Jean Lafitte knew that Jackson had referred to his men as "hellish banditti." He knew that he was still considered an outlaw. But he also knew that unless every man were mustered, Jackson's iron-willed determination to save New Orleans must fail. And he knew that it must fail if ammunition were not supplied to the American forces.

He had men, and he had ammunition.

The smugglers and privateers had already shown their loyalty to the United States and their desire to fight under Jackson. There were some 500 of them available. And in a hidden cache at the Temple they had a supply of 7500 flints for flintlock muskets and a quantity of ammunition.

None of the American authorities in New Orleans suspected the existence of this priceless treasure. Only a few of Lafitte's men knew of it. But Lafitte was near to losing it, nevertheless.

Just at this time General Coffee was at Fort Adams, in northern Louisiana, with 1200 Tennessee riflemen. They were completing one of the greatest forced marches in the world's military history in their attempt to save New Orleans, but they were sadly short of supplies—short of everything from hats to musket balls. Somehow, through a grapevine telegraph that even Lafitte did not

suspect, Coffee learned of the military gold mine at the Temple.

"Lafitte is an enemy of society," said Coffee's informer. "His goods are stolen goods. Why not take them for your men?"

General Coffee lost no time. At eleven in the morning of that day he ordered Captain Gordon to take his famous company of spies and go capture the supplies. At noon the men left.

At two arrived a breathless runner from Jackson in New Orleans, saying that a British attack was expected hourly and that Coffee must hasten with all available men to the city!

So Gordon's company was called back, and the Coffee expedition pushed on.

But at almost the same moment Jean Lafitte was making another of the audacious moves for which he was noted. He went to New Orleans and presented himself openly at General Jackson's headquarters on Royal Street.

Lafitte had confidence in the tall, cold-eyed figure who faced him. He knew enough about Jackson to feel that Jackson knew men; and he knew the perilous straits of Jackson's position. He felt that the American leader would recognize his sincerity, and he calmly put himself in Jackson's power.

So the two met—two tall, thin, cool men facing each other as calmly as though they were discussing a dinner menu. Lafitte the smuggler—polished, easy of manner, quizzical; Jackson the soldier—abrupt, decisive, haggard from illness and fatigue.

Lafitte came quickly to the point.

"I have offered before to put my forces at the disposal of the government of the United States," he said. "I offer them again—my men, my ships, my ammunition."

Jackson's steely eyes stared through the man. With lightning decision he sized up Lafitte, and liked what he saw.

Almost as abruptly as the conference had begun, it was ended.

"We accept your offer," Jackson said. "It is timely, and the United States is grateful."

So at last Jean Lafitte, fugitive, was allied with American authority. Quickly plans were made. Lafitte's men from Last Island and the Temple would be called in at once. Ammunition supplies would be brought to New Orleans for the militia. Dominique You and Beluche, once artillerists for Napoleon, would be released from prison to take charge of batteries for Jackson, and other Baratarians would be freed. They would be deployed on various fronts—Petites Coquilles, Fort St. Philip, and elsewhere—to bolster up Jackson's thin lines.

Governor Claiborne, deeply confident in Jackson's judgment, complied at once. Whatever his personal feelings may have been, he submerged them. On December 17th he issued an official proclamation "To the Barataríors":

> THE GOVERNOR of LOUISIANA informed that many Individuals, who may be, or are supposed to be implicated in the offenses hitherto committed against the United States at Barataria have for some time past concealed themselves on account of their inability to procure Bail, in case of an arrest, but who at the present Crisis, manifest a willingness to enroll themselves and to march against the Enemy, he does hereby invite them to join the Standards of the United States, and he is authorized to say, should their conduct in the Field meet the approbation of Major-General Jackson, that officer will unite with the Governor in a request to the President of the United States to extend to each and every Individual as aforesaid so marching and acting a Free and Full pardon.

Thus the figures of Jean and Pierre Lafitte, of Dominique You and Beluche and the other Baratarians, again came to be seen in the streets of New Orleans. Dominique, ever popular, became more so now that he was enlisted in the defense of the city. And Jean Lafitte, accepted as a member of the military conferences held every day, again was a familiar sight in his favorite haunts.

He was now thirty-four years old, but his appearance had changed little since New Orleans had come to know him. He was "a well-made, handsome man. He was above six feet tall, strongly built; he had large hazel eyes, black hair. . . . His favorite dress was a species of green uniform, with an otter skin cap a little over the right eye. He was gentlemanly in his deportment, of sober habits, and very thoughtful. He spoke French, Spanish, and English fluently. When aroused, he could be desperate indeed, and was a good swordsman and an unerring shot.

"There was no adventurous love tale to tell of him, but he had a *criolla* mistress, a native of New Orleans. . . . There was much order and regularity in his household."

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE FOR NEW ORLEANS

General Coffee had reached New Orleans, with his Tennessee riflemen, on December 20th. One day earlier General Carroll had arrived with a brigade of 2500 from the same state. The forces of defense were assembling for the struggle to save Louisiana.

And they were needed. General Jackson had given orders that all navigable bayous were to be closed, to prevent landing of the enemy; but somebody had miscued. The British found one open bayou leading from Lake Borgne, where their forces were stationed. They bribed a village of Spanish and Italian fishermen to serve as guides, and on December 22nd they captured a small scouting party of Americans. The presence of mind of one of the captives, who coolly informed the British that New Orleans was defended by twelve to fifteen thousand men—actually the forces were hardly a third so large—did much to save the city.

Word of the capture reached Jackson at two o'clock on December 22nd. He learned, too, that General Keane, one of the chief assistants to Sir Edward Pakenham, com-

mander-in-chief, was landing an impressive force. New Orleans was nearly defenseless; Jackson needed the additional troops he believed to be on the way. He had to have time.

He decided on a bold measure. He first gave orders for blowing up the ammunition stores in the city and firing its buildings if the British should succeed in reaching it—orders that struck terror into some of the residents, though they inspired most to loyal defense. Then he ordered Coffee and some of the other leaders to make an attack, and at seven o'clock in the evening the surprised British found themselves under fire from riflemen on land and from the schooner *Carolina* in the river.

The battle was brief—it lasted only until 9.30. "We might have scored a decisive victory if fog had not set in," Jackson reported later. Indecisive though the battle was, however, it saved New Orleans. The British suffered more than 400 casualties, the Americans only 24. Pakenham realized that the Americans were both skillful and earnest, and he feared their numbers to be equal to his—he had 14,450 men. So, instead of advancing at once to attack a wide-open city, he delayed to strengthen his position and gave Jackson the time he needed to throw up earthworks, place his artillery and form his battle line.

What part Jean Lafitte and his Baratarians took in this battle history does not record. Perhaps they were not in-

volved at all. But they were soon to see action. And they, along with the rest of New Orleans, were getting ready for it.

The city looked like a military camp. Every place were soldiers—soldiers drilling, soldiers strolling, soldiers working. Dragoons from Mississippi, brown-shirted riflemen and cavalrymen from Tennessee, Creole militia from Louisiana; regiments of "free men of color," Choctaw Indians, sailors and smugglers and fishermen—all milled through the streets. Military bands marched and played. Citizens walked in the Place d'Armes singing "Yankee Doodle" and the famous French "Marseillaise." The belles of the city, from the lowliest quadroon to the lordliest Creole, smiled on the men and cheered them as heroes.

Meantime, troops were arriving and fortifications were growing. On December 28th the British made an experimental attack at the Bienvenu plantation, southeast of New Orleans, which was hurled back by the Americans with severe loss to the attackers and very little to the untrained defenders. Two days later Jackson discovered the enemy throwing up a redoubt on the right of his line and at once ordered an artillery attack by two guns. The smaller of these two, a 24-pounder, was commanded by Dominique You, and "notwithstanding the great distance, most of the balls struck the parapet, demolishing the works and killing many men."

But the British were not to be discouraged. As the Americans were completing their earthworks, using cotton bales to reinforce the defense line, the British continued work on theirs, employing a quantity of sugar hogsheads. And on January 1st, when a morning fog lifted, enemy artillery commenced a heavy fire preparatory to what was intended to be a conclusive attack.

The cotton bales in the American lines took fire almost immediately; the fire endangered Jackson's powder stores and the bales had to be pushed into the river. But the British sugar barrels proved to be of no more value. Not only Dominique's battery but also those of other American artillerymen responded. Commodore Patterson in the *Louisiana*—the Americans' only schooner since the *Carolina* had been destroyed by artillery fire a few days before—raked the British left with his guns. And the Tennessee sharpshooters, men accustomed to hitting squirrels at long range, so blasted the British infantry that the attack retired in confusion.

Another badly needed respite for Jackson! Militia, 500 of them, arrived from Baton Rouge. Two generals from Kentucky reached New Orleans with a force of poorly armed men. The Kentuckians lacked not only arms but also clothes, and New Orleans's women set to work, day and night, to supply them with waistcoats, pantaloons, shirts, shoes.

Jackson had chosen his battle line wisely. Five miles southeast of New Orleans was a wide, flat plain, bounded on one side by the left bank of the mud-yellow Mississippi and on the other by a deep and nearly impenetrable swamp. Directly across it, from the swamp to the river, ran a little canal; here the plain was only half a mile wide, though it broadened both above and below. On the upper side of the canal Jackson threw up his breastworks. The canal was deepened, and the mud thrown on the parapet. Rails, logs, rocks—anything that could be found—were built into it. A makeshift defense it was; but it was the best Jackson could devise.

On January 7th unusual activity was observed in the British camp, not far south of the canal on the Chalmette plantation—the battlefield is now known as the "Plain of Chalmette." And Jackson deployed 3200 of his 4000 men along the earthworks, holding 800 in reserve. Facing the Americans were nearly 14,000 of the best troops Europe had produced—an inequality of four to one!

The American general had no doubt, now, of the ability or the loyalty of the Baratarians. To Dominique You and René Beluche he assigned Batteries Three and Four, almost at the right of the American line—the Mississippi was only a hundred yards away. They chose their gun crews from among the Baratarians. And the ex-privateers went into line that night with grim eagerness for the fight.

Jean Lafitte, during all this time, had many assignments. One story tells of his having conducted Livingston's family to a point of safety above the city. Another says he went with Claiborne to Lake Pontchartrain, to aid in establishing an important outpost. Jackson sent him with a vessel to the Temple, there to make sure that no British attack might ascend from the rear up the bayous. All these preparations were made before dawn on the morning of January 8th.

The attack was coming! Jackson rode up and down the battle front, inspecting every point, giving final directions. At Batteries Three and Four he found the Baratarians brewing thick black French coffee, their hard faces smiling cheerfully in the firelight. Jackson took a cup of coffee with them, remarked to his aide:

"I wish I had fifty such guns on this line, with five hundred such devils as those fellows behind them!"

And then the attack came. A Congreve rocket, new British offensive weapon which contained more noise than force, went up, and a broad, thick column of redcoats advanced on the left of the American line. Into them poured fire from the sure rifles of the Tennesseeans. The British fell in hundreds.

The attack became general as waves of the British flooded onto the plain. Troops attempted to penetrate the swamp and turn the American flank, but the attempt

failed. American batteries rained cannon balls into the thick ranks of the redcoats, and British guns roared in response.

And General Jackson, riding just behind the line, found Battery Three silent, its crew standing motionless. Dominique was examining a powder bag, his face a Latin thundercloud.

"What's the matter?" shouted Jackson. "Why have you ceased firing?"

Dominique turned angrily. "The powder is good for nothing! It is fit only for blackbirds, not redcoats!"

Jackson sent fiery word to the supply officer that somebody would be shot as a traitor if Dominique received any more poor powder. Later, when the general returned, the little cannon was smoking hot as its crew fed powder and ball into it.

"Good, Dominique!" called the general. "You're hard at work now——"

And Dominique grinned merrily, his black eyes snapping. "I think, General, that the British have learned that we have some new powder."

Very soon he found out how true this was. The British, discovering the huge damage being wrought by Batteries Three and Four, turned the fire of their largest guns on them. Dominique still grinned as he examined the British batteries through a glass.

But a splinter thrown up by one of the British balls grazed his arm, and he flashed into quick anger.

"Hurry—bind it up!" he commanded. "I'll pay them for that!"

The slight wound bandaged, Dominique himself aimed a heavily charged 24-pounder at a British gun. He touched a match to the fuse, and his ball knocked an English gun carriage to pieces, killing six or seven men. . . . The Baratarians lost only one man, a French hatter named Laborde, in the battle.

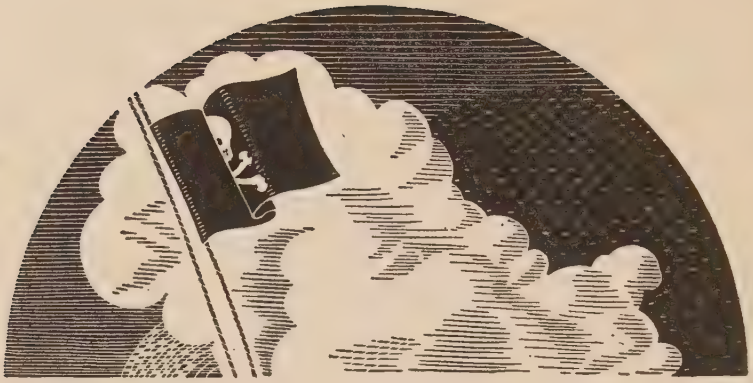
Meantime, Jean Lafitte had returned from the Temple, and Jackson sent him across the Mississippi with General Humbert to aid the American forces there in turning back a British flank movement. But Lafitte found time to visit the battle line that day, and there are a handful of testimonials to his valor and loyalty.

Valor and loyalty, however, were the order of the day. Perhaps the outcome might have been different had the British used a different plan of attack. But Sir Edward Pakenham sent his men squarely into the mouths of the American batteries and made perfect targets of them for the Tennessee and Kentucky marksmen, who never wasted a shot. Pakenham himself was killed; so were dozens of his officers. More than 3000 British lost their lives. Only 13 Americans were killed!

And so the British threat against Louisiana ended, and

with it the War of 1812. Tragically, the Battle of New Orleans was fought unnecessarily, for Great Britain and the United States had signed a treaty of peace at Ghent, in Belgium, on December 24, 1814. But there were no cables to bring the news, and so the battle was fought.

For the Lafittes and their men it seemed for a time to mean the beginning of a new life. The achievements of the Baratarians were subjects for talk in New Orleans for weeks. For the British, too. The redcoats ceased to marvel at the accuracy of American artillery fire only when they learned that some of the cannoneers had been trained in the armies of Napoleon!



CHAPTER XX

"LAFITTE THE PIRATE!"

Jean Lafitte and his men for a time enjoyed the unusual pleasure of being full-fledged heroes. There were no reservations—no sullen undertones, no doubts about the resounding promises Lafitte had made. For the Baratarians had proved their loyalty and their courage, and New Orleans was grateful.

New Orleans' citizens felt themselves suddenly reprieved from hell. The British advance had been accompanied by ugly stories of the British "Beauty and Booty" slogan. As the successive battles had been fought, New Orleans wives and children had fled up the river while

New Orleans fathers and sons had gone into the fighting line. Streets had been turned into drill grounds, shutters fastened tight on shops. The levees had been silent, and tense fear of disaster had stifled the very heart-beat of the city.

Now, with hysterical suddenness, everything was changed. The menace was banished. Stores and shops reopened. Fine ladies came back to town, and the golden-brown quadroons appeared again in the streets. Flags fluttered, and in the Place d'Armes was being built an arch of triumph to celebrate the victory. . . . And the city sang the praises of a thousand saviors, the Lafittes and their men high in the list.

Not only the citizens of the town but also the officials took note of the Baratarian role in the defense. On January 21st Andrew Jackson issued general orders with these paragraphs:

> Captains Dominique and Beluche, lately commanding privateers at Barataria, with part of their former crew and many brave citizens of New Orleans, were stationed at Batteries Three and Four. The general cannot avoid giving his warm approbation of the manner in which these gentlemen have uniformly conducted themselves while under his command, and of the gallantry with which they have redeemed the pledge they gave at the opening of the campaign to defend the country.
>
> The brothers Lafitte have exhibited the same courage

and fidelity; and the general promises that the government shall be duly apprised of their conduct.

Grymes and Livingston had meantime started their suit to recover for Jean Lafitte the vessels taken by Ross and Patterson at Grande Terre, and there was popular sympathy for the action. John Dick, attorney general, suggested to Claiborne that it would be fitting to quash the charges against the Baratarians, and Claiborne replied that such action would meet his approval.

"I think with you," he wrote to Dick, "that the disposition of the President to exercise lenity toward the individuals charged with piracy and other offenses at Barataria . . . will be greatly increased by the good conduct of these individuals during the late invasion of Louisiana."

As it happened, President Madison had already shown this "disposition to exercise lenity." On February 6th, four days before Claiborne wrote to Dick, he had signed a proclamation at Washington declaring "a free and full pardon" for every Baratarian who could produce a statement from Claiborne testifying to his participation in the defense of Louisiana.

But before the proclamation was issued there occurred an insignificant event that, for Lafitte, assumed major importance. January 23rd, just fifteen days after the British defeat at Chalmette, had been selected for official thanksgiving and celebration in New Orleans. In the afternoon

there were solemn religious ceremonies before St. Louis Cathedral, and a laurel wreath was placed—slightly askew!—on Jackson's bristling gray pompadour underneath the arch of triumph. The Place d'Armes was brilliant with silk costumes, loud with cheers, gay with happy faces.

And in the evening a mammoth victory ball was held at the French Exchange. Everybody came to the ball. Common soldiers and the Governor's lady were there, generals and bar maids from the coffee houses; Jackson, Livingston, Coffee, Dominique, Claiborne, Sauvinet, Jean Lafitte.

Jean Lafitte, tall, serious, and immaculate, as usual was a distinguished figure. He circulated coolly in the crowd, chatting a moment here, drinking a glass of wine there. Characteristically, he seems to have told different listeners different stories about himself—an old habit which still amused him.

At length he drifted to a distinguished group. In it were General Jackson and Governor Claiborne, General de Flaugeac and General Coffee. The first two Lafitte knew. He was warmly greeted by Jackson, and he began to chat with Claiborne. For several moments the two laughed together, for all the world like age-old friends.

Then Claiborne turned to Coffee.

"Do you know Mr. Lafitte, General?"

Coffee must have remembered, in a flash, that near-attack he had started on Lafitte's ammunition supply a month before. Perhaps he was laughing inwardly at finding the man he had considered an enemy of society an honor guest with him. He hesitated briefly. De Flaugeac, whether wittingly or not, turned his back.

And Jean Lafitte's pride, with warm-blooded French volatility, imagined in Coffee's hesitation an intended slight. He mistook Coffee's slowness to answer for something Coffee never meant. His hazel eyes went cold, and he drew himself up, stiff as a privateer's mast. Before Coffee responded to the introduction he broke in, his voice crackling icily in the sudden silence:

"Lafitte the pirate!"

For an instant there were tense nerves and caught breaths in the group. Then Coffee laughed in embarrassment, extended his hand, explained and apologized. And Lafitte, as quickly calm as he had been quickly angered, laughed too. The incident passed.

But the incident marked the end of Jean Lafitte's life in Louisiana. His friends felt that his momentary anger led him to believe that New Orleans would never accept him as an ordinary citizen. . . . Not, of course, that he intended to become an "ordinary citizen." The existence of a commonplace burgher didn't fit with his idea of liv-

ing. But he would have liked the right to plan such a life, even though he did not wish to exercise the right.

Before long he made a new move which started New Orleans tongues wagging anew.

The vessels which had been taken at Grande Terre, in spite of Lafitte's suit to recover possession of them, were suddenly offered by the government at public auction. The auction was held, and the buyer proved to be Sauvinet, Lafitte's financial backer. Jean Lafitte had bought back his own boats!

That, to New Orleans, meant but one thing: Jean Lafitte did not intend to give up his privateering nor his smuggling. Tales of piracy were revived; stories of boats that had mysteriously disappeared were told and told again.

And on April 5th Claiborne wrote a significant letter to Commodore Patterson:

> I have reason to believe that a vessel which sailed lately from this port under the command of one Vincent Gambi, formerly a chief in the Barataria Association, is at this time cruising in the Gulf of Mexico, and has already captured two vessels bound for New Orleans. No time and no expense should be spared to put down at once this pirate, or otherwise we may expect a repetition of those practices at Barataria and its vicinity which so long existed to the dishonor of

> Louisiana and to the great injury of the commerce and revenue of the United States. If you do me the favor to call at my office tomorrow, or if convenient at my house this afternoon, I will give you particulars.

Claiborne was willing to take no chances. A patriotic Lafitte was one thing; forgiving him his past offenses in return for his loyalty to the United States was easy for the Governor. But the Presidential pardon did not extend to law-breaking in the future.

So Jean Lafitte and his men sailed away. Most of his Grande Terre leaders were with him as he sailed—Dominique, Beluche, Gambi, Pierre, and the rest. But one by one they fell away from him. Beluche, with the high recommendation of Jackson, became a commodore in the navy of the young Venezuelan republic. Dominique, tiring of life on the sea, decided to return to New Orleans, where he was so well-liked, and enter upon a political career. Gambi shortly cut loose to become his own master.

Jean and Pierre Lafitte did not give up. Intent now on re-establishing the profitable business interrupted less than a year before, they headed for Port au Prince in Haiti. There, they thought, they would find a base for renewed operations.

CHAPTER XXI

NEW PATHS FOR SMUGGLERS

Jean Lafitte had thought of his return to privateering as a return to the easy, convenient occupation he had enjoyed for five years. But he was quickly disillusioned.

The Lafittean monopoly on privateering in the Gulf was shattered. Now that peace had been declared between the United States and Great Britain, there were no major nations at war. American ship owners and captains who had held privateering papers from the United States, entitling them to prey on British commerce, were without letters of marque. They were by no means ready to give up the big gains and the pleasant manner of the privateering life. And they headed in scores, with well-armed, swift sailing vessels, for the insurgent ports of the Gulf, there to obtain papers from one of the colonies which had overthrown Spanish rule.

Lafitte found his competition, now, cut-throat and disreputable. Port au Prince would have none of his fleet. Officials there permitted him to take on food and water, but then forced him to sail away. He had no choice, it appeared, but to seek a port like Cartagena and make it his headquarters.

And now he found his own reputation and his own methods his undoing. Tales of the rich pickings the Baratarians had made on Spanish commerce had brought privateers as honey brings flies. And the Baratarian habit of conducting prizes direct to port for sale, instead of submitting them first to the judgment of a court of admiralty, became the custom.

At first it was easy to carry on this kind of traffic, without courts of admiralty, without even the bond customarily demanded as a guarantee that privateers would take only legitimate prizes. True enough, the United States and Spain had signed a treaty declaring that any vessel fitted out in the United States for privateering was a pirate. But public opinion winked at the offense.

So the privateers, for a time, operated freely and openly. But not for long. Too many merchants and traders were being damaged through loss of cargo or drop in price. Too much blood was being spilled through the scuppers. It became too difficult to send an innocent passenger schooner through a Gulf with as many privateers as it had sharks.

So the ports gradually closed to the privateers. Soon legal condemnation became the only path by which a ship's captain could dispose of his takings. Unless, of course, he chose to follow another of the Lafittean practices.

This was smuggling. And Jean Lafitte quickly discovered that renewal of his smuggling activities was going to be the best method of re-establishing his business. The lower Mississippi and Barataria Bay were virtually closed to him: he must seek a new headquarters and new avenues for his goods to penetrate the United States. Even Bayou Lafourche was too well-known as one of his former haunts.

He set himself to the task of finding new avenues. Meantime, he sent Pierre Lafitte to Washington, in the winter of 1815-16, on another errand.

Ross and Patterson had seized not only the Baratarians' vessels but also quantities of merchandise and gold. The Lafitte lawyers in New Orleans had been unable to regain possession of these treasures for the brothers, and Jean decided to go straight to the highest authority.

So Pierre went armed with a letter from Jean direct to the President, reciting again the tale of the Lafittes' loyalty to the United States and asking for Presidential aid in getting their money—"at least that portion of my property which will not deprive the treasury of the United States of any of its own funds," said Jean. Pierre spent several months in Washington on this errand and, perhaps, on others the nature of which remained hidden. An unproved legend says that Jean himself went to Washington that same winter, there to sprinkle a golden rain

worth $60,000 about in lavish entertainment. But the legend almost certainly confused Jean with Pierre, for Jean was busy with other affairs.

He never got his money from the government. But he did find new paths for his smuggling operations.

West of the Mississippi delta of Louisiana, west of Lafourche and the Bayou Teche and the Atchafalaya River country, there were—and are today—more of the bayou-entwined, alligator-infested cypress swamps. Down through these swamps from the farm lands to the north wound dozens of rivers. Many of them were little more than bayous; but some were deep and wide, broadening now and again into placid lakes. Every one of these rivers Jean Lafitte or his men explored; and at length they selected three as best suited to their purpose.

The three were the Sabine—now the boundary between Louisiana and Texas—the Calcasieu, and the Mermentau. Near the mouth of each, yet far enough behind a screen of cypress and live oak and heavy green pine to conceal the masts of small schooners and feluccas, was a spacious lake. Twenty or thirty miles inland each crossed the famous Old Spanish Trail, and at the crossings were little settlements where Lafitte found men to his taste—men glad to serve as agents for the generous privateer.

Through 1816, then, the Lafitte vessels plied their pri-

vateering routes, took their captives and brought their loot to western Louisiana for disposal. Jean Lafitte himself remained ashore much of the time. He had never liked the sea as well as the land; he preferred directing from a central headquarters to taking part in the actual seizure of prizes.

Frequently this headquarters was the tiny settlement on the Calcasieu where lived one of his agents, Arsene Lebleu. Lebleu was a Creole who had come west from New Orleans. Reaching Lake Charles, a widening of the Calcasieu—"Calc'shoo," it was pronounced—he had built a little trading post and established his home where a bayou emptied into the lake. English Bayou, as the spot was called because English was spoken there, became a well-known station on the Spanish Trail. Cattle drivers from Texas, with their herds of cattle on the way to market, stopped there. Fishermen and smugglers moored their boats in the lake off the high white shell mound that sheltered the settlement. One may still see, imbedded in a big tree on the lake shore, an iron ring to which Lafitte's own vessel was often fastened.

Jean Lafitte liked Arsene Lebleu, and the Lebleu family liked Lafitte. So he was a welcome visitor to English Bayou. For weeks and months at a time he lived there, and he came to be known for his love of good living, for his

wide reading and his learned discussion of literature and drama, just as he had been known in the coffee houses of New Orleans.

But the residents of English Bayou liked him not only for his polished courtesy and for his "education" (everybody believed he had been well and formally educated, thanks to his broad knowledge and interests). He was also an entertaining guest, one who enjoyed their card games and their sports and who participated freely. Tales of pitching pieces of gold for lines drawn on the ground and of swaggering wagers by Lafitte, Arsene Lebleu, and Lafitte lieutenants are still told by Lebleu descendants living at Lake Charles.

"And their bets were not to be sneered at," say these tales. "They did not gamble in terms of a dollar. When they made bets, they used cupfuls of gold. Many was the time Jean Lafitte seized a big tankard and scooped it up full of pieces of eight from a keg of gold at his side!"

The outside world saw little of Lafitte during that year of 1816. Mostly he was at one of the trading posts on the Sabine, the Calcasieu, or the Mermentau, if he was not actually on the Gulf looking for a site where he might establish a new colony to replace the demolished settlement at Grande Terre. Such a spot was difficult to find—it must be easily accessible from the Gulf, yet sheltered from the hurricanes that so often swept the blue

waters into frenzy. And it must not be too near New Orleans and the Mississippi, for the feeling against privateers was growing stronger in the cities of the American coast.

When the time came at last that he was leaving English Bayou for good, Lafitte wished to pay Madame Lebleu for her hospitality, her entertainment of him and his men. She would not hear of it.

"M'sieu, you have been our guest," she told him. "A guest of the house of Lebleu does not pay."

So Lafitte turned to one of his men. Among recent prizes had been fine silk gowns from Paris, fine jewels from Holland. Lafitte ordered them brought for Madame Lebleu.

"If I may not pay," he said, his left eye closing humorously, "I may at least make you a modest present."

The silk gowns have long since disappeared. But a granddaughter of Arsene Lebleu today wears in a ring a big diamond that was part of the "modest present" Jean Lafitte made that day.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COLONY AT CAMPEACHY

Outwardly Jean Lafitte had altered little in the years he had lived in Louisiana. He was still distinguished, suave; he still wore somber dark clothes. He was putting on a few more pounds as he neared forty; he wore a mustache now and then. And, for some reason, he took to signing his name "Laffite."

Inwardly there was more change. The snubs and the disappointments of his life in New Orleans had been bitter. He had been sincere in his loyalty to the United States; yet no sooner was the United States' need of him ended—the smoke of the Battle of New Orleans had barely drifted away—than public opinion had turned against him. That imagined slight offered him by General Coffee rankled. He was turned out of American ports, denied refuge in Haiti; he was welcomed only by outlaws. . . . All of that was a canker on the proud spirit of the man.

But he still had his love of riches, and—more impelling—his need for power. Jean Lafitte could not be anything but a leader. He loved comfortable living, and the means of being lavishly generous; but far more than wealth itself

he loved the thrilling excitement of planning to get it, and the satisfaction of having men under his domination. Lafitte would have made a good feudal baron.

So he did not spend all his time, in 1816, in the pleasures of Arsene Lebleu's home on the Calcasieu. He visited New Orleans secretly; and he cruised up and down the coast of Texas, looking there for a site for a settlement in which he might gather his men and his ships again.

At length he found a spot that pleased him. It was on the end of what was known as Snake Island, a long, low barren strip of land that separated a large bay, then unnamed, from the Gulf. The bay was at the mouth of the Trinity River, so that there was a waterway inland; the whole setting was in many ways similar to that of Grande Terre on Barataria Bay. Jean Lafitte made up his mind that a colony just inside the pass leading from the Gulf would have the security and the isolation he needed.

But there was a difficulty. Somebody else was already there!

Texas was then a part of Mexico, and it was a hotbed of rebellion. Everywhere in Texas attempts to overthrow Spanish rule in order to join the Mexican Republic were in progress. So pretentious had grown this new republic, in fact, that it had appointed a representative to the United States, General José Manuel de Herrera; and al-

though the United States had refused to recognize Herrera's credentials, he was widely accepted as the republic's official agent by friends of the revolution.

Among those who accepted Herrera was Commodore Louis d'Aury, a French adventurer who carried Cartagenian letters of marque against Spain. D'Aury thrived on rebellion against Spain, and he offered his services and his ships to aid Herrera in the fight for freedom. Early in September 1816, he had gone to Snake Island, sailed his vessel, the *Belona*, across the bar, established his own colony on the very spot Lafitte had chosen.

Fighting for possession of the site was not in Lafitte's mind. He preferred other means. And as one method of attaining his end, he and his brother Pierre turned spies for Spain!

A Capuchin monk, Fra Antonio de Sedella, was the chief of Spanish spies in New Orleans. Under Jean's guiding hand, Pierre hired himself to Fra Antonio as an informer. Then he procured a commission from Herrera to transport supplies from New Orleans to Snake Island for the new d'Aury colony. He was to find out what was going on there, and to report to Fra Antonio. Thus Lafitte hoped to enlist Spanish aid against the revolutionist colony if he should need it.

The d'Aury colony seemed firmly established. It occupied the eastern end of Snake Island. Just across the

pass from it on Point Bolivar was the camp of Colonel Henry Perry, an American leading a band of adventurers to the aid of the Mexican revolutionists. In November General Xavier Mina, another soldier of fortune, arrived with more men and ships to join the expedition. Even had Lafitte wished to attack this force, success would have been doubtful.

But the fates were not kind to the expedition. Some of d'Aury's ships and men had been lost trying to cross the shallow bar which bridged the pass. Mina, d'Aury, and Perry did not get along well among themselves. Each wished to be commander, and their bickerings were endless. Finally Herrera made it clear that d'Aury was the official leader.

Yet in spite of such difficulties, which delayed inauguration of the attack on Tampico from the fall of 1816 until spring of the next year, the colony looked formidable. It had official recognition from the Mexican Republic, it flew the Mexican tricolor, and it possessed a court of admiralty. It was attracting a menacing array of privateers, among them many former Baratarians. Captain William Mitchell, who had served with d'Aury in previous ventures, became commodore of a squadron of Snake Island vessels. Dominique You—retired!—was said to be in New Orleans awaiting command of a rebel vessel (though it appears that he never set foot on it). René Beluche, now

under Venezuelan colors, was a visitor. There were many others.

Plans moved along for a strong revolutionist expedition southwest along the coast in the spring, and Spanish agents in New Orleans—informed by Pierre Lafitte—were desperate. In mid-March a merchant brig, the *Devorador*, sailed for Snake Island, and aboard it was Jean Lafitte, traveling as a merchant seeking to buy Spanish prize goods.

When he arrived at the d'Aury colony, Jean found troop movements about ready to start. With the *Devorador* at anchor in the harbor, d'Aury, Mina, and Perry took their men and sailed south on April 7th. They left only a corporal's guard behind, for d'Aury planned eventually to abandon Snake Island and to fortify an island on Matagorda Bay, farther south.

This was a heaven-sent opportunity for the crafty Lafitte. Hardly were d'Aury's topsails below the horizon when he persuaded François de Rieux, left in command by d'Aury, to join him in establishing a new colony. That was much better than taking the place by force of arms!

There was also in the harbor at that time the schooner *Carmelita*, under Major Bartholomew Lafon, United States Army engineer who had participated in the defense of New Orleans. Lafitte went ashore to complete

his deal with de Rieux, and there found Pierre Rousselin, collector of customs, ready to join the new venture. Other d'Aury officers and men followed. Lafon and other merchants, as well as privateer leaders in port, wished to be included.

So, about the middle of April, Lafitte and the leaders met aboard the *Carmelita* to draw up plans for a government. Lafitte did not wish his name to be used officially, so de Rieux was sworn in as commandant. Rousselin was made administrator of the revenue, and a court of admiralty was set up. To all outward appearances a perfectly legal government was created, and Jean Lafitte was well satisfied, for he liked his activities to wear the cloak of legality.

One particularly crafty act of the new government—one that was the idea of Jean Lafitte—was an agreement that it would pay the debts of d'Aury administration, *if* the creditors were residents of the new settlement. Thus these creditors had either to swear allegiance to the colony or give up all hope of having their bills paid!

Lafitte gave the colony a new name, Campeachy, thinking that it was located in the Bay of Campeachy to the southwest. Later, when he discovered his mistake, he changed the name to "Galvez-town" or Galveston, in honor of Bernardo de Galvez, a high official in the Spanish colonial government. This was more nearly consistent

with his secret position as a Spanish spy than with his avowed intention to join the revolutionists.

For one of the first acts of the new officers was to ask of Herrera official recognition as a part of the Mexican Republic. Such recognition, of course, would have put the colony at once on a legal basis. But the return of d'Aury came up to prevent fulfillment of the request.

D'Aury returned, unexpectedly, in early May. His expedition had been disastrous. He had taken Soto de la Marina, but had quarreled with Mina, who was later captured by the Spanish and executed. Perry had failed in an attack at La Bahia and had blown his brains out. Discouraged, d'Aury returned with a sadly weakened force to what was now Campeachy and found it to be occupied by a hostile colony.

There was nothing he could do, especially since several of his remaining vessels, trapped inside Matagorda Bay when sand drifted across and blocked a passage he had thought deep and sure, had had to be destroyed by gunfire. He conferred with the Lafittes, and found them sure of their strength and firm in their refusal to vacate. He discovered that most of his Snake Island garrison had become a part of the new settlement.

And so, bitterly disappointed, d'Aury finally gave up his Mexican venture. In July he sailed away, planning to join a proposed expedition against Spain at St. Augus-

tine, Florida. And he took parting shots at Jean Lafitte in the form of two letters denouncing the man and disclaiming responsibility for what might happen at Campeachy. One of these letters went to Herrera, the other to Customs Collector Beverly Chew at New Orleans.

Doubtless these letters were instrumental in preventing formal recognition of the Lafitte colony by the Mexican Republic. But lack of this recognition was of little significance. Privateers and adventurers who had hastened to join the d'Aury establishment came now in swarms to the Lafitte standard. Official or not, recognized or outside the law, Campeachy quickly became a thriving, bustling town.

Jean Lafitte again had attained the position of leadership he prized.

CHAPTER XXIII

JEAN LAFITTE, COMMUNIST

Lafitte's ambition was to make his Campeachy privateering establishment a copy of the Grande Terre colony. But nature was not as kind as it had been at Barataria.

Snake Island was in reality two islands. The eastern island, called Little Campeachy, was cut off from the larger section by a shallow passage. It was on Little Campeachy that d'Aury and Mina had built their settlements, and there Lafitte planted his flag. Farther to the east, across a shallow inlet some three miles wide, was Bolivar Point, where Perry had been camped. To the north was the big bay—later called Galveston Bay—with Pelican Island in it.

Westward on Snake Island some six miles was Eagle Grove, a tiny clump of cottonwoods and salt cedars; six miles farther was Three Trees, a sheltered spot on the inland side of the island where Carancahua Indians sometimes encamped. Nearby were the Deer Islands, where hunting was excellent; in the bay was Redfish Bar, where great shoals of fish played. Up the bay toward the Trinity River were nesting grounds for wild duck and wild geese.

But on Snake Island itself there seemed to be just one form of life. Snakes! Thousands upon thousands of rattlesnakes made the island their home—so many that even the Indians avoided it, except for occasional use of Three Trees as a base for hunting trips. It was a barren, inhospitable land. Mostly it was flat white sand, made whiter by sun-bleached shell fragments, or turned dusty green by waving stretches of marsh grass. On the Gulf shore were sand dunes which furnished a measure of protection against the frequent hurricanes.

But this protection meant little, as Lafitte was to learn, for from the bay side of the island there frequently blew up storms that all but swamped its low flats. These storms "from behind" had built up a narrow shell-and-sand ridge, and it was on this ridge, comparatively free from snakes, that the Indians camped when they made their visits. On its eastern end the Lafittean colony was planted.

When white men first visited Snake Island, in 1815, the big Carancahua Indians were friendly enough. They were a peaceable tribe, offshoots of one of the tribes of giant Mexican Indians. In spite of their stature, however, they were inclined to be pleasant neighbors. They were fish-eaters, and such skilled swimmers that sharks held no terrors for them; on their left wrists they habitually wore leather bands to carry bone knives with which they often attacked these man-eaters of the sea.

Likely they would have caused Lafitte and his men no trouble if the first white visitors had been as peaceable as they. But they had been fired on by the whites when they sought to make a friendly call; and in retaliation they had promptly killed the whites. They had then celebrated the ceremonial feast demanded by their religion, and the chief viand had been roast meat cut from the arms and legs of their victims. From this event had grown, among them, a distrust of white men, and, among the whites, a belief that they were a bloodthirsty tribe of cannibals.

This was the setting of Jean Lafitte's second colony.

With characteristic energy Lafitte started to develop his settlement into livability. He set some of his men at once to strengthening the rude square earthworks-fort left half-completed by d'Aury. He directed the digging of a wide ditch around it. He ordered the construction

of buildings to serve as homes for the men and their families, and as the taverns, cafés, and gaming houses which must be a part of a settlement of hard, roistering men like his crew. There was an arsenal, a "Yankee boarding house," and a dockyard for the repair of ships. Campeachy was far from any city where such work could be done.

Characteristically, Lafitte also set to work at once to prepare comfortable living quarters for himself. This house, like that at Grande Terre, must be the most pretentious on the island. For its construction Lafitte demanded heavy masonry, for it must furnish safety as well as living accommodations. Rapidly the "Red House," named from its color, grew up, inside the walls of the fort; and before long its two stories, with small cannon thrusting their noses through portholes in a little tower, dominated the settlement. Inside as well as out it was Campeachy's finest building, for it was furnished with heavy mahogany furniture, fine silver plate, silken hangings, choice linens.

"If I am to be a leader," Jean said to his brother, "I must live like one."

But there was more than the physical construction of the colony to occupy him. He had to form a government. And the governmental plan, differing from that of the Baratarian colony, Lafitte took from the advice of a

Christianized Spanish Jew, Jão de la Porta, who was to become an important member of the community.

De la Porta had come to Snake Island as secretary for the d'Aury forces. His brother Morin, one of d'Aury's financial backers, had left with the French patriot. Jão, an albino with queer white splotches on his skin, had cast his lot with the Lafitte colony; he continued as secretary. He was a cunning business man and a sharp administrator, and Lafitte came to value his advice.

"A community like this," Jão said, "would do well to live on a share-and-share basis. Every member should profit by its takings."

So Campeachy became a communistic colony. Every man, from Lafitte down to the humblest servant, was to share in the profits. The leaders were allotted larger shares than were mere sailors; but each could be sure of his "cut" in the winnings of the colony's enterprises.

The communal plan, it speedily became evident, was popular. Men flocked to Campeachy. The settlement became the center of all privateering operations in the Gulf, and hardly a day went by without the arrival of some new prize. Profits were large, and news of them spread rapidly. Before the end of 1817 the population had grown to a thousand—as large as the Grande Terre settlement at its height.

There were men of every color and every tongue.

There were Frenchmen from Napoleon's armies, come to seek new adventure after the downfall of the Emperor. There were Haitians and Santo Domingans, New England sailors and South American soldiers of fortune. There were slaves and Indians and "free men of color," Creoles from New Orleans, Spaniards and adventurers from Texas.

Jão de la Porta continued as secretary, and Rousselin remained as financial administrator for Lafitte. Bartholomew Lafon and other reputable traders from New Orleans became members of the advisory council. A French physician was brought to minister to the men's health, but many of them came to prefer the methods of a "hua," a sun priest of the Carancahuas known as an expert "healer."

And Jean Lafitte had on his hands the biggest job of his career.

He had, first, to supervise the colony's local administration—division of spoils, disposal of prizes, arbitration of disputes, appointment of lieutenants. He wanted to procure official recognition of his settlement as an official outpost of the Mexican Republic—a desire he never gratified. He had to continue his pretense of being an undercover agent of the Spanish government. . . . He reveled in his manifold duties.

But he was less and less often the light-hearted Lafitte

whom New Orleans, Grande Terre, and English Bayou had known. His stern manner, his severity of countenance became more pronounced. And he became a feared as well as a respected man in his community. He never brooked excesses of conduct: a word from him was always enough to stop any brawl, to shame any drunken, quarreling sailor into silence. He was fair in his judgments and kind to prisoners and unfortunates. But he was never soft and rarely gay.

And so, for some months, things ran with busy smoothness in the colony, as profits mounted and each man received his monthly "dividends," sometimes reaching the then amazing sum of $150. The first real trouble came when four men from the commune, off on a hunting trip some distance up the island, failed to return.

"Indians!" swept the word through the colony. "The Carancahuas——"

Trouble with the Carancahuas had been brewing, Lafitte knew. Some of the Indians, visiting the settlement, had been caught stealing and had been banished from the vicinity. A member of the colony had lured a Carancahua squaw from her tribe to live with him in the colony, and the Indians were angered. . . . Lafitte sent out a searching party, and they returned to report that they had found the bodies of the four men. Unquestionably the Indians had murdered them.

Lafitte gave a terse command.

"We will punish these red men. They will not soon forget."

With two hundred men and two pieces of small artillery he crossed the pass to the larger island. He found the Indians encamped near Three Trees, at about the center of the island, and the Indians were ready.

For three days the two forces fought—attacked, retreated, lay quiet; sniped away at each other from the sparse cover the island afforded. At length the Indians, with thirty dead and many more wounded, took to their canoes and fled to the southwest, toward Matagorda. Lafitte, whose force had suffered only slight loss, went back to Campeachy.

That night there was a relaxation of the strict laws of the commune. Drinking and singing, dancing and gayety enveloped the colony. For once Jean Lafitte forgot his severity and allowed himself to be "right merry" for a few hours.

CHAPTER XXIV

BUSINESS BOOMS

General José Manuel de Herrera and other officials of the Mexican Republic, distrustful of the Lafitte settlement, refused formal recognition of Campeachy. Perhaps Herrera heard statements similar to the frank words of Jean Ducoing, the Louisiana business man who had joined the colony and been named judge of the court of admiralty set up by Lafitte:

"Our purpose was the capture of Spanish property under what we called the Mexican flag, but without any idea of aiding revolution in Mexico or in any of the revolted Spanish colonies."

Loot! Gold, silver, precious stones! Silks, linens, shawls of softest wool! Spices, delicately grained woods, rare wines! . . . Slaves!

Unquestionably it was the opportunity for plunder and huge profits that led the privateers to "square away for Snake Island with studding sails set on both sides." Riches poured into Campeachy in late 1817 and early

1818 as they had never come to Barataria, for there were many more privateer commanders connected with the new establishment, and many times the number of vessels.

Yet Lafitte himself never relinquished the position that his colony was a full-fledged ally of the Mexican Republic, and he carried to great lengths his passion for official organization and legal acts. No vessel could deal with him if it did not show proper letters of marque—usually Venezuelan or Mexican, now that Cartagena had been won back by Spain. Every vessel had to submit to the procedure of his court of admiralty, even though no other power, large or small, admitted its jurisdiction. And he insisted on minute adherence to the commune's regulations.

He created a secondary local court to try misdemeanors and crimes within the settlement, a court with a chief judge and thirteen jurymen. But he kept power well within his own hands by giving the commune president the right of veto over his court: de Rieux was the nominal president, but everyone knew that Lafitte held the baton. Capital offenses were piracy, murder, robbery, and mutiny; on several occasions Lafitte saw to it that offenders received the extreme penalty, hanging.

This same passion for strict regulation, by New Year's Day of 1818, indirectly brought about a change in the

officership of the colony. Ducoing and Raymond Espagnol, commanding small vessels which Lafitte judged unseaworthy, objected to his decision.

"My authority is complete," Jean Lafitte told them coldly. "Our laws are explicit. If you question either, there is always your privilege of withdrawal from the commune!"

So Ducoing and Espagnol returned to New Orleans. Not long afterward de Rieux and Lafon also withdrew, leaving Lafitte, Pierre Rousselin, and Jão de la Porta in the important offices. Soon a new figure, H. Grammatton, appeared—a man of whom little is known beyond that he was a skillful business man and that his name appeared as witness to many of the formal papers issued in the commune in the next two years. He replaced Lafon in the commune's councils.

But all these changes were of minor importance. For Campeachy was incredibly prosperous—too prosperous, it sometimes appeared. The privateers were bringing scores of captured vessels to port, and there was nothing to do with them. They could not be sold here on the Texas coast, as had been possible at Barataria. There were too many of them for the privateers to use. And so many of them were sailed or towed to shallow waters in the harbor and burned. What is now Galveston Bay has dozens of blackened skeletons of prize vessels rotting

on its bed or half buried in the sand dunes of its shores.

Likewise the amazing quantity of prize goods was bringing visitors to Campeachy. Word of the bargains there spread to the cities of the United States, and buyers sailed in increasing numbers to share in this gold mine. Usually they disembarked at Point Bolivar, across the passage from Little Campeachy, for it became known that Lafitte liked to inspect callers before he welcomed them. A farsighted innkeeper named Selik built a rude hotel at Point Bolivar, and made himself a fortune taking care of these merchants.

Business boomed. There were now more than two hundred houses, stores, and hotels in Campeachy, and it was being called Galveston, the name under which it was to become one of America's leading ports. Colonel Warren C. D. Hall, a Louisianian who had espoused the cause of the Mexican patriots, became a frequent caller and a close friend of Jean Lafitte. Expeditions left every week, by land for Alexandria from Point Bolivar and by sea for the agents' posts in the Sabine, Calcasieu, and Mermentau Rivers. Smuggling parties even went up Bayou Lafourche, although this was a little too close to New Orleans for comfort.

Still, in spite of the hordes of buyers and the continual smuggling expeditions, goods piled up at Galveston faster than the commune could dispose of them. So Lafitte and

Grammatton devised a new business. They became fur traders.

The business was simply organized. Furs were available in unheard-of abundance along the Gulf: Texas and Louisiana had hundreds of trappers and hunters. They brought their furs to Galveston and exchanged them for merchandise brought in by privateers, always on a basis profitable to the commune. When enough furs had accumulated, Grammatton sent a load away on one of several small schooners especially fitted out for the trade. They were carried either to an American port or to Jamaica or Martinique—wherever the fur market promised to be best at the moment. And there they might be sold perfectly legally, for furs were neither contraband nor prize goods.

Authorities in the United States, meantime, were not ignorant of what was going on. The customs collector at New Orleans more than once asked aid from the Secretary of the Treasury at Washington in halting activities at Galveston. Alone, he said, he was unable to stop "the most shameful violation of the slave act, as well as our own revenue laws, by a motley mixture of freebooters and smugglers at Galveston, under the Mexican flag."

It was known, too, that the *Jupiter*, called the fastest vessel in the Gulf, had been commissioned in Charleston early in 1817 for Jean Lafitte. It was known that she car-

ried Venezuelan letters of marque. And her heavy armament, consisting of a 28-pounder swivel gun and six 32-pounders, was feared and hated by merchantmen and traders.

Spain also was eager to be rid of the pest that buzzed like a hornet over the shipping of the Gulf. But just at this time Spain was unable to take active steps against Lafitte. She was too busy with a handful of minor revolutions, and she didn't wish to ask the United States to punish Lafitte, even though many of the Galveston vessels, fitted out like the *Jupiter* in American ports, were legally classified as pirates by the provisions of the latest Spanish-American treaty. To have asked such actions would have been to admit the United States' claim to power over that section of the Texas coast, an admission Spain did not care to make.

So nothing was done through 1817 by the only powers that could effectively have curbed the privateer's activity, and Galveston's life went on undisturbed. Jean Lafitte continued his claim to the rights of a port of the Mexican Republic; he continued his intrigues with Spanish officials in the hope of being given Spanish protection if he should need it. And he repeated his protestations of loyalty to the United States.

His loyalties had become as changeable and as unpredictable as the fickle winds of the blue Gulf.

CHAPTER XXV

HURRICANE!

As the end of 1817 approached, the Indians recovered from their fear of and enmity toward the whites and became frequent visitors at Galveston. Lafitte saw in them valuable aid to the development of his fur business. They were skilled hunters, and they were willing to trade hundreds of dollars worth of furs for a few cents worth of mirrors or bright cloth or shiny knives to use in place of their home-made bone implements. They brought fish and other game to help supply the village with food, too.

And they came to take a more personal part in the commune's life. Many of the sailors, admiring the Indian women, brought them into the village, married them, and went into housekeeping. The Indian women were not only handsome: they were big and strong, and they were accustomed to hard work. Admirable wives indeed!

New Year's Day of 1818 seemed to Lafitte a fit occasion for celebration. So he decreed the day an official holiday, and the entire colony—not only the officers and the ships' captains, but also the sailors and Indian visitors—enjoyed the gayest hours a Lafitte community had known.

There was drunkenness on that day, particularly among the Indians, for the whites considered them very funny when they had had a glass or two of fire-water. But there were many other diversions—everything from foot races and wrestling matches on the firm white sands of the beach to crude practical jokes and the exchange of hastily drawn caricatures, much like the comic valentines of a later day.

One of the popular games was called "sand billiards." It consisted of pitching shells at small holes dug in the earth—a game Lafitte had learned at English Bayou. It required real skill, for the holes were dug in loose sand, and any man whose flying shell dislodged a single grain from the edge of the hole was disqualified. A throw had to be perfect, or it was a zero on the score sheet.

It was the occasion for uproarious mirth, on that day, if one of the veterans of the colony could persuade a newcomer to turn over an odd bladder-like Portuguese man-of-war—a floating sea animal something like a jellyfish which was often found on the beach, left by the retreating tide—and search among its brilliant pink and purple and blue tentacles for the pearls which, the veterans said, were sure to be there. The newcomer never found a pearl, but he frequently discovered that a Portuguese man-of-war is armed with a powerful sting!

New Year's Day passed, and Lafitte, still with de la

Porta and Grammatton as his chief lieutenants, went into what promised to be his most prosperous year. Privateers came and went, the stock of goods on hand mounted, and business grew. The black bones of burned vessels became a charred forest. Often, now, Lafitte ordered a prize vessel to be stripped of its valuables and returned, well provisioned and watered, to its captain and crew.

"If we permit these ships to return to the sea," he told those of his subordinates who did not like this clemency, "they can find new cargoes which we can capture. The more merchantmen, the better our business."

And his eyelid closed in that characteristic wink. So continual a habit had this action become that many of the newer members of the colony believed Lafitte was blind in his left eye.

Jean Lafitte, though he was approaching middle age, was more active then ever before. Not only did he direct the affairs of the colony from the Red House, where he settled disputes with the characteristic sternness which made him so well obeyed and the habitual fairness which kept his men so fiercely loyal. He also maintained a small sailing vessel, the *Ciel Bleu*—"Blue Sky"—in which he visited personally each privateer that came into Galveston Bay to inspect it and to take stock of its prizes.

And the dramatic moments which helped as much as his fairness to hold his men continued to occur. At times,

instead of hanging men who had been found guilty of capital offenses, he suspended sentence and merely slapped their faces! By the code of the day, they were forced to challenge him to duels. And he always closed the affairs by giving the men slight wounds and earning their unswerving allegiance.

One day a sailor crazed by liquor ran amuck, a broad knife in his hand and murder in his eye. Lafitte overpowered him and took the knife before he could do any damage. Another time a sailor fell overboard into the shark-infested waters of the bay. When it was seen that the man could not swim, Lafitte dove from the deck of the *Ciel Bleu* and kept him afloat until help arrived.

Slaves brought to the island were treated with kindness, following Lafitte's express orders. If they were sick —as usually they were, for the slave ships which brought them from Africa often failed to care well for them— they were nursed back to health. Members of the colony were allowed to do pretty much as they chose, if they obeyed the commune's simple regulations. Jão de la Porta, tiring of his duties as secretary of the government, wished to return to trading, an occupation for which he had a peculiar genius. Lafitte appointed him "supercargo," or trading agent, to deal with the Carancahuas. Men whose interests seemed to be more deeply bound up with the cause of Mexican revolution than were Lafitte's

own were paid, if they wished, in ammunition and arms instead of gold.

So the summer of 1818 came along. It brought with it devastation of the new town of Galveston.

A howling, ripping hurricane blew up out of the Gulf of Mexico, and not even Jean Lafitte's fine Red House, firmly as it had been constructed, was able to withstand the gale.

They saw black clouds of the storm coming up from the south late one afternoon, and Lafitte and some of his leaders went aboard a schooner anchored in the bay. Women and children of the colony, by his orders, were herded into the Red House—the safest spot, Lafitte thought, he could find for them.

But the storm surpassed his fears. The schooner on which he had taken refuge, securely moored as she was, rolled over on her side like a toy boat in a bathtub. Thanks to the shallowness of the bay she did not sink, and by high good fortune neither Lafitte nor any of his men was injured. . . .

But morning, when its gray light showed what had been the colony on the island, told a dreadful story. The Red House had collapsed, and the cannon in its tower had fallen on the huddled women, killing a few and injuring many. Hardly one of the flimsy stores and homes was more than a mass of jumbled wreckage. Hundreds

of men had died. The shrieking of the wind died to allow the moans of the injured to be heard.

Lafitte did not hesitate. Somehow he got ashore over the dying waves of the bay and started his relief work. He marshaled his scattered, demoralized forces and set about binding wounds, bringing families together, finding food in the wreckage and distributing it to those who could not find it themselves.

The task seemed hopeless. Galveston was a watery desolation. But the courage and the tirelessness of the leader slowly brought order to the wreckage. For days and nights on end Lafitte struggled. Shattered buildings were cleared away. The injured were tended. Lafitte's high courage flashed spirit into the hearts of the colonists, and in a few days they could see the beginnings of a new village under way.

And, said Lafitte confidently, it would be a better city than before. Why, even the hurricane had wrought some good!

"It tore down the worthless shacks we had," he said. "And it left heaps of asphalt, or mineral pitch, on the beach. Splendid roofing for new buildings!"

The colony took heart and went to work.

The food question was serious. The storm had swept away or ruined all supplies. It had even carried away the cooking utensils.

"There are thousands of pelicans and millions of fish waiting for us to take them," Lafitte said. "And as for cooking dishes—why not use big shells until we can get something better?"

A hunting party one day came hurrying back with word that a small whale had been blown ashore down the island. When the party discovered it, it had been blowing and thrashing about in shallow water, and musket balls had failed to kill it. Lafitte hurried a small carronade into position, and one shot dispatched the big fish.

That whale helped to solve the food problem, and it solved the lighting problem too. For the whites and the Indians joined in cutting it up and in taking its precious oil in those same shell vessels. Blubber in oily strips was cut from it, to be used as food or to be rendered and made into more oil.

Still the food question was serious. Lafitte helped to meet it by sending away at once a cargo of Negroes, to be sold in Louisiana. Fewer mouths to feed—more money with which to build!

Though the profits of his year on Galveston Island were swept away in a single night, Lafitte went undiscouraged about the task of recovery. But—though he did not know it then—Galveston had seen its best days.

CHAPTER XXVI

UNWELCOME VISITORS

THE new Galveston, in spite of Lafitte's plan to make it "better than ever," was less pretentious a settlement than had been the village called Campeachy. Lafitte himself decided not to attempt reconstruction of his Red House. Instead he moved what was left of his fine silver and rich mahogany to the *Saragossa*, the vessel stranded in the bay, and made of her cabin a slightly askew but most satisfactory home and business headquarters.

New homes and stores and boarding houses sprang up with surprising celerity. But they were simple affairs.

"If we are to be at the mercy of any gale," said the men doing the work, "we'd be foolish to put too much energy into these buildings."

So they built one-story shanties by sinking corner posts into the sand or the hard white grit of the shell ridge, boarding up the sides, covering the roofs with palm thatch, loose lumber or canvas, and sealing holes with the pitch the sea had brought. Rarely did they go to the trouble of laying floors in the shacks. Sand was clean, wasn't it?

Though the hurricane had caused so much hardship to those who had been on Galveston Island, it did no harm to the colony's reputation, and it did not turn away members of the commune. Buyers continued to come in droves to Point Bolivar, there to signal for transportation across the passage. Privateers continued to bring their cargoes of slaves and merchandise; smaller boats continued to leave the island for the Sabine and the Calcasieu, to dispose of their slaves at fat profit.

So lucrative was the slave trade becoming, as Louisiana began to feel more stringently the effects of the embargo on importation of Negroes—the law had now been in effect for ten years—that many adventurers were making a regular business of buying slaves at Galveston at the prevailing dollar-a-pound price and reselling them in better markets. Because of his need for ready cash, Jean Lafitte was glad to take advantage of the opportunity to sell them speedily instead of transporting them himself to market.

Prominent among the new traders were the Bowie brothers, Resin, John, and James. James Bowie was later to become famous as a leader of the Texan forces against Santa Anna's Mexicans at the Alamo in San Antonio, and as the inventor of the bowie-knife. Years later he described the trade he found so profitable.

"At that time each state was allowed to regulate the

laws covering smuggled slaves in its own territory," Bowie explained. "In Louisiana the law said that smuggled slaves, when they were captured, must be sold at auction by the customs officers. Half of the sale price always went to the informers who 'denounced' them to the officers.

"So we bought Negroes from Galveston at a dollar a pound—$140 was the average price—and took them, by boat or overland, to Louisiana. New Orleans was a favorite market. There we organized slave-handling companies which, immediately on arrival of a consignment, 'denounced' it and turned it over to customs officials. At the auction which followed the companies bought back their own slaves, and at once received half their purchase money because they had informed the customs officers.

"Then the companies took the slaves direct to the plantations, sometimes carrying them far up the Mississippi, to resell them to planters. In this manner we often got prices of $1000 for prime Negroes. . . . It was a highly profitable business!"

So profitable, in fact, that between 1818 and 1820 the Bowies boasted a net earning of $65,000. Other traders made comparable profits.

It was at this time—shortly after the storm—that the Galveston colony received a large and not altogether

welcome addition in the shape of a group of 350 French refugees under Baron Charles François Antoine Lallemand. Lallemand had been a Napoleonic general after Napoleon had returned from Elba; when the Emperor's forces were defeated and Napoleon himself sent to St. Helena, Lallemand gathered a group of sympathizers and set out to establish a new colony in the New World. He picked the Texas coast for his colony's new home.

Lafitte had met Lallemand, with his advance party, and had aided the French settlers to set up a temporary camp at Champs d'Asile, up the Trinity River. After the hurricane the entire group came to Galveston Island, prepared to make its home. Lafitte was not enthusiastic about the presence of this new element, for it could take no part in his activities. But it gave to his men a ready opportunity for trading; it added numbers to the population of Galveston Island; and it was French and Napoleonic, factors that gave it the sympathy of both of the brothers Lafitte.

So, when Lallemand asked permission to settle on the island, Lafitte assented.

"Why not build your colony where Mina started to throw up earthworks two years ago?" he suggested. "There you would be near my city, yet far enough away so that we need not conflict."

The proposal suited Lallemand. He brought supplies

from New Orleans, unloaded his colonists on the island and set to work to establish himself.

Meantime, Spain and the United States were growing more and more uneasy about developments in the Gulf. The two countries were negotiating for a definition of the boundary between Spanish and American territory; the Sabine River, north and east of Galveston, was being talked of, but so was the Brazos, south and west. Neither country was willing for a French colony to get too firm a foothold in this disputed territory.

Moreover, privateering that too often descended into outright piracy was causing increasing trouble in the Gulf. Tales of the power of the Lafitte colony were bothering United States officials and Don Luis de Onis, Spanish ambassador at Washington. Some of the lucrative trade between Mexico and ports of the two countries was being frightened completely away from the Gulf, using ports on the Pacific coast and the long voyage around the Horn instead of trying to thread safely through commerce lanes so dotted with privateers.

On June 2, 1818, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams ordered Colonel George Graham, a United States Army officer, to Galveston to inquire into conditions there.

Whatever Colonel Graham expected to find, he looked neither for the weakness that seemed so apparent in both

colonies nor for the lavish hospitality with which Jean Lafitte received him.

For he found himself the guest not of Lallemand but of the privateers' commander. And Lafitte, partly because it was good tactics to make this official visitor welcome and partly from his love of elaborate entertaining, outdid himself as a host.

Graham was a bluff and adventurous soul. He saw the pleasant side of life in the Galveston colony, and he entered into it heartily. He went hunting with Lafitte—hunting not only with a rifle but also with the blunt-nosed arrow the whites had adopted from the Indians to kill snow-white egrets without spilling blood on the birds' glistening plumage. He accompanied a Lafittean expedition to subdue a band of Carancahuas become momentarily warlike. He spent long evenings with Lafitte alone, sipping old liqueurs, discussing Lafitte's projects and listening to the man's passionate and carefully calculated defense of them.

"I have never been a true soldier or a real sailor," Lafitte told Graham, his dark eyes flashing with what Graham took for "pain and indignation." He was trying to convince his guest that the charges of piracy against him, told and reiterated in New Orleans, were false. "My first baptism of blood was when, in 1815, I fought with General Jackson against the British in New Orleans. I have

never permitted piracy or unnecessary bloodshed by my men, and all their captures have been made under the conditions of maritime laws.

"Do you suppose the government of the United States would have tolerated my making my headquarters at Barataria for four years if my vessels had committed piracy? Why, on this very island I have signed orders which have brought about the execution of four officers who disobeyed orders and committed acts of violence."

Frankly and bluntly the two discussed Lafitte's activities, and with characteristic ardor Lafitte defended not only the legality of his privateering but the depth of his loyalty to the United States. In a formal letter to Graham —a letter he prepared on August 28th at the colonel's request, as part of Graham's "evidence" to be displayed at Washington, he said:

> I took Galveston Island simply with the idea of preserving and maintaining it at my own cost. . . . In so doing I was satisfying the two passions which imperiously dominate in me, that of offering an asylum to the armed vessels of the party of independence and that of placing myself in a position (considering its proximity to the United States) to fly to the country's assistance should circumstances demand it.

The letter went on to tell of his strict orders against any attack on the American flag. He explained that formal

recognition of Galveston by the Mexican Republic had been denied him only because his letters to the revolutionary government had never been delivered. "I did not know the United States claimed all the land to the Bravo del Norte," he added, "but I am now as always willing to conform to the government's wishes."

And he concluded that he was being calumniated by "persons of a certain importance," but that he was confident that he would be given justice in the end.

CHAPTER XXVII

A VISIT TO WASHINGTON

GRAHAM left Galveston early in September, with friendliness toward Lafitte and little fear that either Lafitte or Lallemand had sufficient power to annoy the government of the United States.

"Your Mexican privateering commissions aren't much good," he told his host bluntly as he was leaving. "You ought to get others in better standing. Why don't you try the new government at Buenos Aires?"

He summed up his official findings in a report to General Elezear W. Ripley, stationed at Vermillion Bridge, Louisiana, as commander of the American forces on the border:

> Such arrangements have been made with General Lallemand and Mr. Lafitte, who command separate and very distinct establishments here, for the abandonment of the place as I presume will be entirely satisfactory to the government. It has been promised by these gentlemen that, in the event of the occupation of this place by forces of the United States, they and those under their command shall be protected. . . .

Graham's report, as he intended, satisfied American authorities that the situation did not demand immediate action. Both Lafitte and Lallemand had made definite promises to leave if the United States wished. Though these promises set no date for evacuation, they placated American doubts for the moment.

The American colonel continued in his effort to persuade Lafitte to strengthen his position by seeking out the representative of the Buenos Aires government in New Orleans, a man named Laforest. He told Laforest of Lafitte's willingness to leave the Texas coast, and made a suggestion:

"Why doesn't your government give Lafitte letters of marque, then grant him authority to establish a court of admiralty of his own on the South American coast?"

But Graham's effort to aid Lafitte—or to get him off the Texas coast!—did not suit Jean's plans. Soon after the American's departure, the Lallemand colony decided to give up its hope for a home on the Gulf. The French leader's money was running low. He visited Lafitte and confessed that his venture was a failure.

"Too bad!" sympathized Lafitte. "But—since you must leave, I shall certainly want to be of assistance——"

His eager offer of help took the form of the gift of a captured Spanish vessel, the *San Antonio*, with its captain and crew of ten. Lafitte provided the vessel with all the

food, water, and other supplies he could spare. And with a good deal of relief he watched the last of the French board the schooner, saw the ship weigh anchor and its sails disappear over the horizon.

"Now," he told Pierre, who had recently come to Galveston from New Orleans, "now we shall be free of interference."

But Pierre was not so sure.

"Those officials in Washington—they may not be as easily satisfied as Graham," he warned. "Perhaps one of us should go to the capital——"

The brothers argued the point. At length Pierre won, and it was decided that he should make the long trip to Washington, while Jean remained at Galveston.

So, as autumn set in, Pierre left the island, armed with a letter to Graham from Jean which said that "my brother will inform you verbally of what is going on about this locality on the part of the Spaniards."

And all this time the crafty Jean, knowing the importance of the good will of these same Spaniards, was in regular correspondence with Spanish officials at Havana. He was claiming allegiance to three governments.

The character of the Galveston colony was, during all this time, undergoing a subtle change. More and more it was becoming a refuge for the fugitive and the lawless. Men driven from the ports of the United States and from

Spanish and South American settlements were finding shelter under the doubtful legality of Lafitte's command. As always, Lafitte was keeping a mailed-fist control of matters on the narrow confines of his island—Graham had expressed amazement at and admiration for the personal strength of the commune's leader. But not even Lafitte's power could control the vessels whose reckless captains bore his letters of marque after they had sailed out onto the wide stretches of the Gulf.

Still newcomers arrived to join the band. James Campbell, a young American adventurer, was one. Captain John McHenry was another. Captain William Cochrane, a New Englander, became one of his confidantes. And a French-Canadian named Lacassinier replaced Jão de la Porta as trading agent on the island.

Lacassinier arrived at Galveston on Christmas Day of 1818. Lafitte put him aboard a rakish small schooner, the *Rageur*, and early in February the *Rageur* had the misfortune to mistake for a Spanish merchantman a vessel that turned out to be a corvette-of-war. The *Rageur* got away, but Lacassinier was crippled. He asked for shore duty when the schooner limped into Galveston Bay, and Lafitte gave him de la Porta's job.

The winter of 1818-19 brought hardship to the commune. Galveston had not yet recovered from the hurricane of a few months before. Food was scarce, money

scarcer. Captures of slaves and merchandise were rare that winter, and the city was kept alive largely through energetic hunting and fishing by its residents.

Word from Pierre in Washington was not encouraging. He met Don Luis de Onis, the Spanish ambassador, and arranged for the exchange of several Spanish prisoners held at Galveston for some of Lafitte's men imprisoned at Havana. But his protestations of the innocence and good intent of his brother's actions had little effect on the sympathies of American authorities.

In spite of hardship and discouragement, Galveston lived through the lean winter. Spring brought some improvement. The Spanish had devised a new scheme for the shipment of bullion, so that they might use the Gulf instead of sending cargoes around the Horn, and captures picked up.

Until 1819 gold and silver bullion from the rich mines of Mexico and South America had been shipped in bulky, slow schooners which ordinarily carried cargoes valued at $100,000. Now the Spanish discarded these cumbersome boats and built small, fast schooners, which bore only a fifth as much treasure, stowed in a specially built compartment amidships. The theory was that such vessels were much more likely to escape from privateers than were the larger ones, and that even if they were captured the loss was smaller.

Use of the new vessels proved satisfactory to the Spaniards, for their loss to privateers was reduced a full fifty percent. But even fifty percent of former captures was better for the privateers than none, and money again began to flow into Lafitte's hands. The presence of the bullion-carriers also brought the slave trade back to activity in the Gulf . . . and expeditions up the Louisiana rivers were soon resumed. A captured slaver, a 400-ton Spanish vessel, was converted into Lafitte's largest and finest cruiser.

Jean was busy and content again. He sent word to Pierre to return from Washington—his efforts were no longer needed there. The American government would never get around to doing anything. . . . News that, by a treaty between Spain and the United States in February, the Sabine River had been made the international boundary made Jean feel even more secure. Now he was definitely on Spanish territory, and he was confident Spain would give him no gray hairs.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MORE MEXICAN PATRIOTS

Lafitte was right. Spain caused him no trouble. And Graham had left pacified, and Lallemand had taken his disappointed colonists away. Business was improving. It looked as though fair weather lay ahead.

But there were as many clouds on Lafitte's horizon, or lying just out of sight beneath it, as there were hurricanes in the placid Gulf.

Captain William Mitchell, once a member of the Baratarian colony and more recently a privateer sailing under Galveston letters of marque, had always been troublesome. He had more than once shown resentment of Jean Lafitte's authority, and now he decided to set himself up as a full-fledged rival. He took his vessel and crew to Grande Terre and established for himself a new Baratarian base.

Lafitte had been too well convinced of the growing strength of the United States to attempt to operate so close to New Orleans. Mitchell, with more insolence than caution, undervalued the governmental power. . . . Very quickly Commodore Patterson, the man who had

led the expedition against Grande Terre in 1814, sent out the United States cutter *Alabama*, and she destroyed Mitchell's embryonic colony and captured his vessel.

Mitchell's activities for nearly two years had been conducted on his own responsibility. But aboard his vessel Patterson found privateering licenses issued by Lafitte. That was evidence enough to American authorities, and to American merchants and citizens growing increasingly irritated at interruption of their businesses, that Mitchell had been merely Lafitte's agent in an attempt to re-establish the Baratarian base.

So whatever favorable impression Colonel Graham's report had created was shattered less than a year after it was made.

And even before this time a new problem had arisen in Galveston Bay. This problem arrived by land from the north, in the shape of a party of "Mexican patriots" led by General James Long.

James Long was a Virginia doctor with a love of adventure, a gift for leadership, and a private fortune. In the spring of 1819 he put all three to work by organizing at Natchez a big party of Americans to head into Texas and aid the Mexicans there in their fight against Spain. In June he led his band across the Sabine and set up headquarters at Nacogdoches, where the "Supreme Council" he organized elected him its president. One of his first

official acts was to seek an alliance with the Galveston colony of Lafitte.

He selected Colonel James Gaines, one of his aides, to lead a mission to the privateer leader, sending with Gaines two men as chief negotiators. The party traveled south to Anahuac, an Indian village on Galveston Bay, and there embarked in canoes for the island on the Gulf. True to his technique, Lafitte received them with elaborate courtesy and rich entertainment. But he carefully avoided committing himself until he had read Long's letter which told of the purpose of this newest patriot:

> Having learned that you are stationed at Galveston with a considerable force and that you are connected with the same cause we are, I send to you Messrs. Johnson and Smith, citizens of the country, who will inform you of my coming here. . . . Our idea has always been that of occupying a position near you and establishing an admiralty court. I suggest to you the idea of accepting a commission and patent of reprisals from our government to cruise under the flag of Texas. If you can arrange this with your other business, I should have much pleasure in holding a conversation with you in this place within a few days.

To Jean Lafitte this was not only unwelcome interruption but also intolerable effrontery. Join Long's flag, indeed! Journey to Nacogdoches to talk with Long! Long

was to Lafitte an upstart, another adventurer like d'Aury and Mina and Lallemand, whose power was yet unproved and whose expedition might as readily fail as had the other three.

Yet there were other considerations. From the things Johnson and Smith told him, Lafitte knew Long was a force not to be sneered at. The goal of Long's endeavor, banishment of Spain from Texas, was the mask under which his own activities were carried on. And Long might have other plans up his sleeve.

So, as he had done so often, Lafitte sparred for time. He needed to know more about Long, and he wanted to show this brand new general that he was by no means willing to play second fiddle. On July 7th he composed a long letter, to be borne back to Long by Johnson and Smith, a masterpiece of honeyed words which told Long very clearly between the lines that Lafitte, too, was a power to be reckoned with.

He was delighted, he said in the letter, that he was to have a new ally in the cause he had been "upholding for eight years." He had aided previous expeditions, and he intended to aid further in the attack on Spain as soon as there arrived at Galveston certain supplies he was expecting. And he went on:

> You tell me, sir, that you have hoisted a flag. I please myself in believing, sir, that it is the same one which

> already exists, for it would be inconvenient to take another than the one for which we have been fighting for eight years; that would show a sort of inconsistency, indecision, and instability, which would only produce a bad effect. Furthermore, our flag is recognized at Buenos Aires and Venezuela, and our Corsairs who carry it are received as friends by the authorities of these two provinces. Such is sufficient reason for keeping the colors.

He closed with an explanation that he could not leave Galveston until Pierre's return from Washington, and a plea not to "allow me to remain in ignorance of anything which will enable me to enter into relations with you."

Underneath his smooth phrases Jean Lafitte was boiling. But, as the boat bearing Gaines, Johnson, and Smith pulled away from Galveston Island, he looked at Lacassinier, his business agent, with that quizzical wink.

"The general will not misunderstand me, I think."

He was right. General Long saw at once that Lafitte was not to be overawed by a mere letter.

So he sent another emissary, Horatio Biglow, who was a member of the Supreme Council, to Galveston to continue negotiations. Again Lafitte met his guest with oily words and abundant entertainment. And Biglow found the entertainment too much for him. He got drunk the day he arrived in Galveston, and remained drunk for

weeks on end. Lafitte despised him and paid him little attention. Long, waiting anxiously for word, heard nothing.

By September his situation had become precarious. Spanish Royalist forces under Colonel Perez were closing in on him. He took his band of seventy-five men to a village called Cooshattie, on the road to Galveston, and left them there with orders to fortify themselves against the enemy. Long himself hurried at once toward Galveston, to try his own luck with the wily Lafitte.

General Long was received, like the others, with silky hospitality. He was quartered on the *Saragossa*, and he was assured of Lafitte's heartfelt desire to form an alliance to further the freeing of Texas.

Long was impressed by Lafitte's colony. "Doubloons," he told a friend, "were as plentiful as biscuits." The Galveston community was not nearly as unable to lend aid, he saw, as it was unwilling.

But he also saw that it would be impossible for him to organize east Texas to suit the purposes of his Supreme Council without Lafitte's aid. And so he outlined to the privateer the acts which, in preparation for his visit to Galveston, he had directed the Council to pass.

"We wish to establish a military post on Point Bolivar," he said, "for the protection of Galveston and the approach to the Texas interior. We wish to make Galveston a free

port of entry, to set up an official court of admiralty, and to make you governor of the city. We need your help, and you need ours."

He could hardly have chosen arguments better calculated to impress Jean Lafitte. The man's passion for power and his love of legal form were both flattered by the Council's measures. So, in spite of his original distrust, and his disgust at Biglow's behavior, he agreed to Long's suggestions.

"Sir, I accept your offers," he said. "You may rely on the aid of Galveston."

That promise was all Long wanted. Desperately in need of further help, the general set out at once for New Orleans to seek it. He left behind him two officers of his party, Colonel Warren Hall, whom Lafitte already knew and liked, and Major Daniel Smith. Hall was to have charge of the new Bolivar post.

And that was almost the last Lafitte saw of General Long. Long returned to Texas later in the fall, there to suffer a disastrous defeat by the Spanish. He retired to Louisiana, safely across the Sabine. Major Smith and a good many of Long's men joined Lafitte's band. Colonel Hall remained at Bolivar, making visits across the inlet almost daily, long after Long's forces were routed.

In New Orleans, while all this was going on, feeling against the privateers of the Gulf, and against Lafitte's

privateers in particular, was riding high and higher. "Why can we not have government protection?" asked the Louisiana *Courier*. "Does not Louisiana bring in worthwhile revenue to the United States? Is not the Gulf coast of the United States as important to the country as the Barbary coast of Africa, against which the government sent its ships?"

Anger heightened when the Lafitte commission was found on Mitchell's vessel. And an incident in September fanned anger into action.

Lafitte had bought in New Orleans a brand new schooner, the *Bravo*, and had sent Jean Desfargues and Robert Johnston with sixteen men to sail it to Galveston for use as a privateer. Barely out of the Mississippi, the *Bravo* had overtaken, captured, and looted a Spanish merchantman. The cutter *Alabama*, under Captain Loomis, had sailed onto the scene just then, engaged in a sharp but brief battle with the *Bravo*, and taken her captive as a pirate.

On September 13th Loomis sailed up to the New Orleans levee with his prisoners. Quickly the United States District Court put them on trial, convicted them of piracy and sentenced them to hang.

News of the affair was rushed to Galveston, and Jean Lafitte sped to New Orleans to arrange for defense of his men. Pierre was already there, having at last returned

from Washington, and he wrote a lengthy letter to Commodore Patterson, protesting the legality of the Galveston settlement and its actions. Some of New Orleans, the brothers found, could still remember the high favor that had once enshrouded the Lafittes. Old followers flocked to them, and a violent demonstration which forced authorities to call out the militia ensued. Planters and business men who were loath to give up the profitable trade made possible by Lafitte activities came to their defense.

But the efforts of Jean, Pierre and their friends did little good. They obtained reprieves for all of the men, and for one, John Tuckers, a full pardon. But the rest, including Desfargues and Johnston, were hanged as pirates.

And the *Courier* asserted vigorously that it was General Long's duty, "in humanity's name," to see to it that Jean Lafitte was put in chains and brought to justice.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PIRATE TRAIL

The Government, as represented in New Orleans by Commodore Daniel T. Patterson, had no intention of waiting for General Long to "bring Lafitte to justice." Before the case of the *Bravo* was settled, a new outrage spurred the government into immediate action.

The Louisiana *Courier* of October 22nd published an advertisement signed by John Lyons, Jr., a planter of St. Landry Parish, offering rewards for the return of ten slaves stolen from his home on September 27th. On that day, Lyons said, a band of "twelve or fourteen armed villains," with blackened faces but good English speech, attacked his home on the Bayou Queue Tortue—Stream of the Twisted Tail. The bandits trussed up Lyons and his wife and children, and promised them death if they made any outcry. They ransacked the house, took what they wanted, and made off with their loot and the ten slaves.

"Pirates!" said New Orleans. "Pirates from the Gulf!"

"Lafitte!" said Patterson, the Frenchman's implacable enemy. "Lafitte, up to his old tricks!"

And without delay he ordered out the United States schooner *Lynx*, under Lieutenant-Commander J. H. Madison, to patrol the Gulf coast of Louisiana, find the bandits, and bring them to New Orleans for trial.

The *Lynx* sailed first to the Mermentau River, from which opened the Bayou Queue Tortue. Off the bar Madison anchored his vessel; into the river he sent a small boat under the command of Lieutenant J. M. McIntosh. A short distance up the river McIntosh, overtaking a fisherman's skiff, learned that two armed boats had been cruising in the Mermentau and the Calcasieu, robbing and looting wherever they landed.

"They have mistreated our women," said a fisherman bitterly. "They have stolen our money."

"And," added another, "they call themselves Mexican patriots. They bear a Lafitte commission——"

That was what McIntosh wanted to know.

"Where are they?" he asked eagerly.

"The bird has flown," responded the fisherman. "They left last night for the Sabine."

McIntosh waited only to persuade one of the fishermen who was familiar with Louisiana waters to join him as pilot. Then he sped for the *Lynx*, and on the way the fisherman gave him more information:

"A Lafitte privateer and a Spanish schooner which it has taken as a prize are in the Calcasieu. They have gone

up as much as a hundred miles. For trading, they say. But you know what their trade will be. . . ."

Hastily McIntosh reported to Madison. The *Lynx* weighed anchor and set all sail for a dash to the Sabine.

The schooner halted just before nightfall off the mouth of the Sabine, and her sailing master, Mr. King, took two small boats to seek the bandits. "Guard the river's mouth tonight," ordered Madison. "Proceed northward in the morning."

But King was hardly across the bar when he sighted his prey. For two hours he gave chase, his crew pulling for dear life up the sluggish Sabine. By that time he was almost in gunshot—his boats moved faster than the larger craft of the bandits—and the fugitives suddenly turned inshore, disappeared into the cane swamps, and leaped from their boats to flounder away through the poisonous marshes. King was deprived of his captives, but he took both the bandit boats, fine small sailing vessels, in tow and returned to the *Lynx*.

"At any rate," said Madison grimly, "those pirates will not find life in the swamps pleasant. Likely they will head for Galveston by land. And that will give us time to take a look up the Calcasieu."

An overnight sail brought the *Lynx* to the river that Lafitte himself had sailed so often. Again Madison ordered

out two boatloads, this time under McIntosh and Purser Fanning. He gave them not the schooner's small boats, but the two larger vessels captured in the Sabine.

"Take provisions enough for a week, and plenty of ammunition," he ordered. "You may be gone for some time."

For two days the vessels sailed northward, through the long stretches of Calcasieu Lake, Lake Prien, and Lake Charles. Past English Bayou, where so many of Lafitte's friends lived, they went. They found nothing, and McIntosh queried his fisherman-pilot anxiously.

"You're certain the privateer came up this way?"

It was black night, and cypresses loomed blackly along the shores. There was no sound but the steady beat of the oars and their creaking in the locks. On one side or the other opened mysterious bayous, many of them wide enough and all deep enough to permit a fair-sized vessel to enter. They might have passed their quarry.

But the pilot was sure.

"We are getting close," he said.

The sailors muffled their oars. McIntosh's boat hugged one shore, Fanning's the other. Occasionally the bark of a wolf or the splash of an alligator diving under water broke the silence. Dawn came, and still nothing had been found.

"They are near," the pilot insisted. "A little farther——"

"We won't go much farther," McIntosh declared. "We'll ask at that house——"

On the shore, in the gray light, he had seen a little cabin. He halted the boats, and he and Fanning disembarked and approached the place. McIntosh beat on the door until at last it was opened by an ague-ridden, terrified old man.

The old man mistook his visitors for members of one of the Lafitte bands so common in the Calcasieu. Mistaking them, he gave them the information they wanted!

"The vessels are hidden nearby, in a bayou," he said. "If you will follow me——"

McIntosh was not to be caught in a trap. "Are the crews aboard?" he asked.

The trembling old man answered quickly. "They have hidden far back in the forests," he said. "Soldiers are after them."

More questions satisfied the young lieutenant that the man was telling the truth. He took a party of his men and followed the aged guide to the hiding-place. He found the prize schooner and the privateer, as well as a nearby cache of valuable cargo. And so, still without human prizes, he headed back down the river.

It took three days to pilot the four boats to the mouth

of the Calcasieu. Madison, pleased at the rich haul, was eager for captives to go with it.

"It would be hopeless to seek the crews of these last two boats," he said. "But those others . . . they have had five days to work their way back toward Galveston—"

And so the *Lynx* up-anchored again and set off for Jean Lafitte's headquarters. A fog blanketed the coast when the vessel arrived off Galveston Island, effectually concealing her from prying eyes on shore. But at noon the fog lifted. The *Lynx* was so close to the beach as to be almost in the path of a small sailboat making for the settlement on the island.

"Take her!" Madison commanded. "And—take a prisoner this time!"

So small boats set out, and cut off the sailboat's approach to Little Campeachy. The sailboat turned and fled for the shore of Point Bolivar; the *Lynx's* boats pursued. The fleeing craft was beached, and men poured out of her to race for safety. It looked as though another attempt was to close without a captive.

But the sailors could see that some of the fleeing men were having difficulty. Some of them lagged, fell, stumbled on again. Their mates seized them, dragged them on. One fell too far behind, and the pursuers swooped down on him like vultures on a wounded rabbit.

They found their captive in a pitiable condition. His clothes were in tatters, and he wore no shoes. His feet were torn and bloody, and dreadfully swollen. His mouth was dry, his eyes insanely wild. He was too weak to resist capture, and the sailors had no trouble in taking him back to the *Lynx*.

But only one word could he utter. "Food!" he gasped. "Food——"

So Madison had the man fed, under the watchful eye of the ship's surgeon. Obviously he was nearly starved. He wolfed his food like a wild creature—the surgeon had to restrain him to prevent his literally eating himself to death.

At length he had gained strength, and the wild gleam in his eyes quieted. He told his story.

CHAPTER XXX

GALLOWS ON CAMPEACHY

THE man's tale was one of terrible suffering.

"As you suspected," he admitted, "our crew is the one you chased ashore in the Sabine. Rather, it is what is left of the crew. For we did not all escape from the swamp, and of those who did not all reached Point Bolivar.

"We set out from the Sabine for Galveston Island the same night you took our boats. But it is a long journey —near a hundred miles—and we had no arms. For we had thrown them into the river as your boats neared us.

"It is a hard journey, too—through desolate country, over harsh ground where the marsh grass has blades like knives and the briers tear the very flesh from a man's bones. And there is no food for men without guns. When three days had passed, we were desperate with hunger. We decided it would be better for one to die swiftly than for all to starve slowly."

McIntosh and Madison hardly believed their ears. The man went on.

"We drew lots, and one of our mates, an Italian sea-

man, was the loser. Sirs, we killed him—bled him to death —and then devoured his body. . . . The meat and the marrow from his bones gave us strength to keep on our journey, and last night we came to Point Bolivar. We were faint with hunger, but we contrived to build a signal fire. Had not Jean Lafitte sent a boat for us, we were ready to sacrifice another of our number. . . ."

The man was exhausted, and his story was ended. Madison decided quickly on a course of action.

"Take a boat and go ashore," he ordered McIntosh. "You will deliver to Mr. Lafitte a letter I shall write, demanding the surrender of these men to the Government of the United States."

Meantime, Lafitte was waiting in his cabin on the *Saragossa* for word from the small boat he had sent to answer the signal fire on Point Bolivar early that morning. No word of the purpose of the *Lynx*, or of the fate of the men who had been pillaging the Louisiana coast, had reached him. So he was tense with anxiety as he saw the approach of this young lieutenant of the United States Navy. The Navy, as he knew of experience, usually meant business.

But whatever nervousness he felt did not show in his reception of McIntosh. He met the lieutenant with scrupulous courtesy and the ever-present Lafitte hospitality;

he took his visitor to his schooner-dwelling before he would consent to talk of business. Then he took Madison's letter and read it slowly—read it again, and a third time. He looked up with a disarming smile.

"Sir," he said to McIntosh, "I am most truly happy that you have succeeded in tracing these vagabonds this far, and that your capture of one of them will enable you to identify the rest. You must assure your commander that they will all be taken—they cannot now escape me. And it will afford me very sincere pleasure to deliver them over to him, to be dealt with as pirates. They have been acting under no authority from me, nor from any person connected with this government."

This reassuring speech completed, he called one of his men.

"Launch the *Ciel Bleu*," he directed, "and proceed to Point Bolivar. There you will take aboard the men who fled from this officer, and bring them to me as quickly as possible."

Then he continued his assurance that he would do all in his power to expedite justice. But secretly he wanted time—time for his own investigation, time to lay plans to protect his men if he should be convinced of their innocence. For it was a basic Lafittean creed that the men who were loyal to him could rely on his support.

So he made another suggestion to McIntosh.

"It will be some time in the night before my boat will return," he said, "and you have not more than time to get on board your vessel before dark. The bar is a dangerous one to those unacquainted with it. So I will not detain you to answer in writing the letter of your commander, but will do so tomorrow when you return for the men."

Lieutenant McIntosh was impressed by Lafitte's manner and his courtesy, and he decided to accept the suggestion. He took his leave and regained the *Lynx* just as night set in. And he was hardly aboard before a roaring wind from the south blew up, making it hazardous for the schooner to retain its close-offshore anchorage. Madison ordered the vessel to sail into the Gulf, and it was several days before he dared to return.

The weather gave Jean Lafitte the time he desired.

The situation, he learned, was just as McIntosh had outlined it. The prisoners, five of them under the leadership of one William Brown, admitted the plundering of the Lyons plantation as well as the other piracies charged to them. Lafitte went into black anger. He had taken this man Brown, a blustering, ill-famed adventurer, under his flag with misgivings. Now his fears were realized.

"We will try the men at once," he decided, "for disobedience of the commune's orders."

Speedily the court was assembled. Its proceedings were

brief. The five men were found guilty, and Brown was sentenced to death.

As the *Lynx's* small boat pulled for the entrance to the harbor, after the schooner had at last come to anchor on a sunny afternoon, somebody commented on an odd-looking structure in the distance, just on the tip of Little Campeachy. It looked like a signal mast of some kind, with something hanging from it. Or, said one of the men, like a gallows.

McIntosh took a spy-glass and examined it carefully.

"It is a gallows," he announced at length. "And a man's body is hanging from it."

Wondering, he kept the boat on its course. Again Lafitte received him with open arms and ceremonious courtesy. But McIntosh could not restrain his curiosity.

"The gallows, Mr. Lafitte," he said, "what does it mean?"

The Frenchman smiled. But his smile was cold, and the wink of his left eye had no humor in it.

"You may tell your commander," he said, "that I found the leader of this group so very bad a man, and so old an offender against my laws, that I have saved the trouble of taking him to the United States. I have hanged him myself!"

McIntosh, already well under the spell of Lafitte's

charm, found here new evidence of the man's sincerity. But this was not all that Lafitte wanted. He wished to keep the United States' friendship; but he resented what he considered undue interference with his authority, and he decided to let McIntosh know how he felt.

"I shall be glad to deliver the other four men to you," he said. "But perhaps you would like to see my reply to your commander?"

So McIntosh read Lafitte's letter; amazed, he read it again. In it the "governor of Galveston" informed Madison in no uncertain terms that he felt the presence of the *Lynx* to be unfriendly, and that he had no intention of permitting even a United States vessel to take undue liberties with "a port of the Republic of Texas." So direct and, McIntosh felt, so offensive was the letter that the lieutenant told Lafitte, courteously but with no doubt in his manner, that he could not bear such a message to his superior officer.

Probably Lafitte had not expected such firmness from the young American. But his purpose had been accomplished. He apologized profusely, and rewrote the letter in a manner that McIntosh said would be acceptable. "The words to which you object," he explained, "doubtless appear because of my imperfect knowledge of your language!"

McIntosh's business was ended, and he prepared to de-

part with his four prisoners. But Lafitte, accompanying him to his boat, looked doubtfully at the heavily laden craft.

"Your boat is too low in the water," Lafitte said. "I urge you by no means to try to cross the bar if there be the slightest increase in wind, or if night should overtake you before you reach it."

Nevertheless, the boat put out. But Lafitte's warning proved wise. There was a rough sea on the bar, and McIntosh quickly realized that it would be suicidal to try to pass it. He turned back for the lights of Galveston—it was night by now—and found a lookout posted by Lafitte waiting his return.

"I am delighted," Lafitte told the American. "Now you will be my guest—you and your men—without the formalities of business. Your prisoners will be held for you until you can make another attempt to reach your vessel."

McIntosh's visit, this time, lasted for nearly a week. For the wind that had stirred the sea on the bar sent the *Lynx* again scudding out to the safety of the open sea, and she did not return for seven days.

The week was a pleasant one for the young sailor. As always, Lafitte extended himself for his guest. McIntosh hunted, fished, swam. He spent happy days, and in the evenings he sat in the luxurious cabin of the *Saragossa*

and talked with Lafitte. Young and curious, he asked Lafitte frankly whether his position were not a difficult one.

"You have hard characters around you," McIntosh said, "men like this Brown who would cheerfully murder you. You would be alone if there should be mutiny. Is it not difficult to control your men?"

Lafitte smiled his quizzical smile.

"Never in the least. I understand the management of such men perfectly, and I keep them under good control, as you have just seen by the prompt manner in which your prisoners have again been placed in irons. I know precisely how far to go. I would have saved your commander all trouble in relation to these men if I had deemed it wise, by hanging every one of them.

"But I saw, sir, that to have hanged another would have been one step too far—some of my men might have grumbled. I made it appear that I considered the example sufficient, and I retained my complete control."

McIntosh's stay passed quickly. At length the *Lynx* reappeared off the harbor entrance. The lieutenant went back on board feeling, as he told Madison, that he had passed a week with a man who, "if he had his vices, had also his virtues, and who possessed a courteous and gentlemanly deportment seldom equaled and not to be surpassed."

CHAPTER XXXI

MURDER AND MUTINY

On November 23, 1819, the *Lynx* delivered her four prisoners to government officials at New Orleans and reported the hanging of Brown. It appeared that, by his prompt execution of Brown and his ready acquiescence to Madison's demands, Jean Lafitte might again placate the fears of the United States government.

But the temper of New Orleans had changed. Five or six years before Lafitte had been a hero in the city; the Creoles had been secretly if not openly in sympathy with his mode of life. More and more, however, New Orleans was being "Americanized." Its citizens were becoming conscious that continued disobedience of law could not but harm trade in the Gulf. And the number of tales of piracy on the seas, so many of them connected with Lafitte's men if not with the leader himself, was disquieting to this new turn of attitude.

Only a week before the *Lynx* arrived the Louisiana *Courier* had reported the death of Vincent Gambi, "of awful memory." Gambi, it seemed, had had his head

chopped off by his own men after their seizure of a small cargo of gold on the Gulf. This end to the Italian's "horrid career," in the opinion of the *Courier*, was eminently fitting. And thousands of citizens of New Orleans could not help remembering that, though Gambi had been sailing on his own responsibility in recent years, he had once been a leader in Lafitte's band.

Lafitte's prompt appeal to his lawyers of five years before, Grymes and Livingston, for aid in saving not only the crew of the *Bravo* but also the four prisoners brought in by Madison was also viewed with misgiving in the city. It made his action at Galveston seem nothing more than a gesture. Even the presence of his brother Pierre in New Orleans, arguing vigorously that Jean was legal governor of a law-abiding community, was hardly convincing.

At Galveston, Lafitte worked hard at the job of showing the world outside and his men inside the commune that his word was law. He executed a captain named Francis for having disobeyed his orders against attacking any except Spanish vessels. He sent out cruisers to capture and arrest Francis, tried him and hanged him to the same gibbet on which Brown's body had dangled.

And he sent out his own new ship, the speedy black *Jupiter*, on legitimate trading expeditions. Her mission was to take prize cargoes brought to Galveston by pri-

vateers and properly condemned in admiralty court, transport them to United States ports and sell them. In January 1820, there appeared in the *Niles Weekly Register* this notice from Alexandria, Louisiana, dated December 24th:

"The *Jupiter* returned to Galveston after a short cruise with a valuable cargo, principally of specie. She is the first vessel that sailed under the authority of Texas. She sailed again on the first inst."

But in spite of all these efforts, in spite of Lafitte's ardent desire to establish Galveston in the eyes of the world as a port of the Republic of Texas, things were not going well. The evil effects of the storm of 1818 could still be felt. Money was scarce. Dividends paid to members of the commune, satisfyingly high in former days, were dwindling. Again Spanish trade was being diverted to the Pacific, after a brief period of renewed activity in the Gulf.

And Lafitte's personal power over his men, he began to realize, was not what it had been. Whispers of mutiny were in the air. The population of the commune had decreased to a bare 400 men.

It was during this winter that the food-and-money problem became so acute that Lafitte ordered a vessel fitted out for whaling. He remembered that stranded whale which had proved so useful after the hurricane,

and he decided that there might be profit for his men in whaling on a larger scale. He was right: it was profitable. But the men who had swarmed to the Lafitte standard for adventure and for gold did not like the greasy, arduous work connected with it, and it soon had to be given up.

Jean Lafitte himself, now forty years old, had changed little. He was still reserved, still stern in his government and surprisingly gentle and thoughtful to men who needed his help. He never gave up his love of entertainment; Colonel Hall, still on Point Bolivar, visited him often for long talks over coffee, cigars, and liqueurs. Captain William Cochrane and he became especially intimate. Toward such men as these he was cordial and good-natured. But he retained toward the seamen and the hangers-on around the village the dignified distance that had always marked him.

By this time he was seeing the inevitable result of his attempt to build a small kingdom for himself. He knew, now, that it must fail—that the United States would not be long satisfied by the hanging of Brown nor by the makeshift flag he flew. He had made, in December, a last attempt to get Spanish aid; in that month his desperation led him to write the Spanish governor at Havana asking for "eighty to one hundred men" to aid him in repelling the forces of Long!

He was a disappointed and a defeated man. But he never let down his defiant proud screen; he never showed his fear that he must give up Galveston. He kept more to himself; he read interminably, and he could still astonish Hall by the breadth of his knowledge.

And he fought for control of his men with the same flair for drama that had always played so important a role in his actions.

In 1820, Captain Jean Batiste Marotte, a soldier of fortune to whom Lafitte had given command of a ship with serious doubts, sailed into Galveston Bay with a prize cargo of Negroes and merchandise. He and Captain James Campbell had taken several prizes on the Mexican coast, he reported. And he turned his cargo over to Lafitte with a grand gesture.

But he did not know that Campbell, who had been a Lafitte man longer than he, had reached Galveston two days ahead of him. On examination of his prize list, Campbell told Lafitte that several cases of silver plate and fine watches, valued at a hundred thousand dollars, were not included. And Lafitte, eyes steely with wrath, demanded an explanation from Marotte.

It was a tense moment there aboard the *Saragossa.* Marotte, blustering valiantly, replied that the cases had been lost overboard as they were being transferred from the prize ship to his vessel. But Campbell hotly denied it.

"I saw the cases put aboard your ship," he said, "with my own eyes!"

Lafitte's lips narrowed, but his voice was cool.

"You will tell me at once where you have hidden——" he began.

Marotte, cornered, was still defiant. Instead of replying, he gave Jean Lafitte a deadly insult. He spat in the Frenchman's face.

For a heart-beat there was stunned silence. Then members of the crew broke out in fury.

"Hang him! To the gallows——"

But Lafitte stopped them. A smile, a grim shadow of a smile, played around his lips.

"No. We will not hang him. The Captain and I will fight a duel."

Quickly it was arranged. Campbell was Lafitte's second, a man named Shebal was Marotte's. The privateer captain still blustered, still swore his innocence. With elaborate care he prepared for the duel—tested his pistol, adjusted his clothing. The two men marched to their positions on the sandy beach of Pelican Island. And then, suddenly, Marotte's brazen front melted.

"I stole the watches," he whimpered. "I will restore them, pay for them—anything if you do not make me fight——"

Now Lafitte's dark face showed only scorn. Dropping

his pistol, he walked up to Marotte and, seizing his shoulders, whirled him around. His foot came up in a lusty kick. Then he turned to Campbell.

"Send men for the hidden watches," he said.

The incident helped, for a time, to hold in check the dissatisfaction of the men. Adventurers like these privateers always admired cool audacity. But their grumbling was not stopped for long.

For one afternoon when Lafitte was aboard the *Jupiter* in the bay, just off the Three Trees, a messenger came breathlessly.

"Mutiny!" he whispered. "They plan to take the *Jupiter* tonight—to murder you——"

Lafitte asked one question. "How many?"

There were six, the man replied. Six plotters, waiting for nightfall. The Spanish had promised to reward them handsomely for Lafitte's death or his delivery to Vera Cruz.

To the messenger's surprise, Lafitte apparently took no precautions for safety. But when night came he and a few others were stationed silently inside the *Jupiter's* cabin. For hours they waited. At last came the sound of slinking footsteps, the creak of the opening cabin door.

At a signal from Lafitte, pistols roared. The invaders fell. . . . The next morning six bodies, bullet-riddled, washed ashore on the beach.

CHAPTER XXXII

FINIS

Jean Lafitte quelled this mutiny as easily—and as dramatically—as he had quelled that earlier discontent at Barataria Bay, when one of Gambi's men had marched on him. But he could not suppress so simply the spirit of dissatisfaction, of unsated greed, of distrust that lay behind the mutiny. For the first time in a decade control of his men was slipping from his hand.

In spite of his hanging of Brown and Francis, of his ridicule of Marotte and his repeated admonitions to his men, he could not keep their ambitions and their avarice in leash. In former years, with prizes plentiful and communal profits high, his prompt and fair divisions of earnings had easily satisfied them. Now, though Lafitte's fairness and his quick justice were unchanged, the men were not hearing the jingle of gold in their purses, nor feeling the warm hardness of cash in their fingers. . . . Depredations that were not even disguised piracy became more frequent.

An American vessel was captured, plundered, and scuttled in Matagorda Bay, only a few miles down the coast

from Galveston. There was no denying that a Galveston privateer had been responsible. There were more raids on the Louisiana coast, more captures of English and French and American as well as Spanish vessels. The American government was becoming increasingly incensed, and it was spurred to action by British and French complaints. And the removal of the Lafittean colony was one of the conditions laid down by Spain in a treaty negotiated between President Monroe and Don Luis de Onis.

The Matagorda incident drove the United States again to action. A three-man commission came from New Orleans late in 1820 for the third governmental investigation in three years. The three men, Davis, Johnson, and Dr. Oliver, appraised the situation and returned to the United States to report unfavorably. The commune's authority was flimsy, they said, and its operations of a decidedly dubious nature.

"Galveston must be destroyed," was the government's ultimatum.

Yet Lafitte anticipated trouble from Spain rather than from the United States. Galveston and the Republic of Texas were on territory claimed by the Spaniards, not the Americans. Consequently, when a brig appeared off the bar at the harbor entrance early in 1821, the Galveston governor supposed it to be a Spanish man-of-war.

Captain Campbell, one of the few trusted lieutenants remaining in the colony, happened to be on the island. Lafitte called him to the cabin of the *Saragossa.*

"Take a small boat," he commanded, "and reconnoiter that vessel."

Campbell's boat went out under cover of darkness and hovered around the brig during the night. When dawn came, he discovered that she was not a Spaniard, but the United States ship *Enterprize.* He hailed her lookout and was invited to come aboard.

Her commander, Lieutenant Lawrence Kearny, was cordial and pleasant—invited Campbell to remain for dinner—but he was also uncommunicative. When the two left the *Enterprize*, after the meal, to go ashore, Campbell had no inkling of Kearny's mission.

For nearly the last time, then, the familiar scenes of hospitality and entertainment were enacted on Galveston Island. Lafitte offered Kearny the same pleasant life he had given McIntosh fifteen months before. He banqueted the navy man, chatted with him for long hours, took him on hunting expeditions, showed him every corner of the colony and every phase of its activity. He made a brave attempt to convince his guest that Galveston was what he claimed—a legitimate port of a new government, with him its legal dictator.

Kearny stayed for two weeks while the *Enterprize*

rode just outside the harbor. During that entire time he did not mention his errand. At length, as the two men were conversing aboard Lafitte's vessel, he came to the point.

"I have a message for you from the Government of the United States," he said.

With no turn of expression Lafitte took the lengthy document. Carefully he read it. At its end he came to the significant sentence:

"It is the desire of the American Government that you evacuate the island at the end of three months."

Even then Jean Lafitte, his hopes falling in dust around him, did not lose his composure or his urbanity. He simply bowed politely.

"If it is the desire of the United States," he said, "it is the law for me."

And Kearny returned to the *Enterprize*, promising to return in May to see that his instructions were carried out.

By no word or expression did Lafitte show resentment or disappointment. He knew that, this time, there was no denying the request of the Government. The United States was in earnest. And the power of the United States had become too strong, and his own too emasculated, for him to think of resistance.

So, after four years of heartbreaking effort to build up

for himself a new empire, to make himself master of a little maritime province, he set resolutely about the work of dismantling it. He told his men of his purpose; he overrode their objections. He gave directions for division among members of the commune of what money, spoils, and ships remained under his control. He was as stern and as even-tempered in this work as he had always been when his fortunes were riding high.

He would go south along the coast of Mexico, he told his captains—Spain's power was in that direction, but there was no place for him to the north and east, where the United States held control. He sent posthaste to New Orleans for Captain William Cochrane, absent with the *Eloise* on a trading expedition. He conferred with Colonel Hall, and made arrangements to transfer some of his property and arms to Hall's settlement across the pass on Point Bolivar. He heard rumors of mutiny, but he kept his iron grip on Galveston's affairs and made his plans in spite of the murmurings.

At length, when the *Enterprize* again appeared outside the harbor in mid-May, he was ready. The division of spoils was completed—unfairly, some of the men believed, for it was said that Lafitte had huge quantities of plate and gold in a secret hiding-place—and vessels were ready to sail. The little fort on Galveston Island was nearly dismantled. Many of the men had left. Some who remained

wished to live on at Galveston, but Lafitte was adamant.

"The colony will be destroyed," he said. "That is my promise, and I am going to keep it."

On May 11th a boat from the *Enterprize* came into the harbor, bearing Lieutenant Kearny and other officers. Jean Lafitte received them aboard the vessel which was to carry him away, the *Pride*, and gave them the same suave cordiality they had known before. He told Kearny in detail of his plans.

"Would you like to see what remains of my city?" he asked.

They went ashore. They saw a few men at work on last-minute sail repairs. They inspected the fort, now in the last stages of destruction. They saw empty little wooden houses, shabby and desolate.

"You see, sir, my preparations are complete," Lafitte said. "Please remember that, in spite of all that has happened, I am friendly to your country. . . . I have many friends in New Orleans, even though I am called a pirate there."

He pointed suddenly to the gibbet on the beach. The body of a man still dangled from it.

"You see that?"

Kearny asked its meaning.

"That is my justice," Jean Lafitte replied soberly. "That villain plundered an American schooner. The cap-

tain complained to me of him, and he was found guilty."

"These look like graves," said Kearny as they passed two hillocks in the sand.

"Yes," answered Lafitte. "One of them is that of a man caught in a plan to murder my steward, who then had in his hands almost all my people's money. We gave him a court-martial fairly, and he was sentenced to be shot by the steward. A very great villain. . . . Shall we return to my vessel?"

Back to the ship they went, and Lafitte ordered a final elaborate dinner. For several hours he entertained the officers. Then the men shook hands with Jean Lafitte, whose bearing they admired and whose sincerity they trusted, and returned to the *Enterprize*.

Last-minute tasks occupied the "Governor of Galveston." Campbell had steadfastly refused to join the expedition to the south—his wife wished him to give up the sea and remain on land. Lafitte sent Captain Cochrane for a final attempt to persuade the New Englander to join him.

Cochrane found Campbell on shore.

"Well, Jim," he said, "I suppose you know my business?"

Campbell smiled. "You want to smuggle me off to the brig, but I won't go. If you persist, I'm afraid I'll have to shoot you."

Cochrane shrugged his shoulders.

"You know what confidence Lafitte has in you," he replied. "But if you won't go, you won't. . . . Let's have a drink."

There were odds and ends to be taken aboard the *Pride*. There was an unexpected conference with General Long, who turned up at this inopportune moment with reinforcements from New Orleans and a demand that Galveston be left in his power. Lafitte refused.

"I am turning some of my properties over to Colonel Hall," he said. "But Galveston is to be destroyed."

That night was very dark. But suddenly, from the decks of the *Enterprize*, a brilliant light was seen on the island.

"Fire!"

Fire it was. Torches had been touched to the tinder-like shacks that were all that remained of Galveston. In a few moments the whole harbor glistened in the roaring flames.

And across the bar, as though fleeing the blaze, sailed the shadowy forms of three ships. Jean Lafitte had kept his promise. He had destroyed his kingdom, and he was sailing away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIII

MONUMENT IN MEXICO

Only once again was Lafitte to visit the United States. Of his loyalty to his adopted country those who knew him best had little doubt, though for years he had posed as a Mexican patriot and feigned to be a Spanish spy. But he knew now that it had definitely and finally cast him out.

So southward he sailed with his little fleet, embittered and ready to act the part, at last, that so many tongues had assigned to him—the part of a pirate. Along the Mexican coast he halted briefly to take some minor Spanish prizes. He passed Tampico and Vera Cruz, sailed into Campeachy

Bay—the Campeachy for which he had mistakenly named Snake Island.

At Sisal, on the coast of Yucatan, his fleet overtook and captured a schooner laden with Negroes. The best market for Negroes was Cuba, where the slave trade was still accredited. Helms were set for Havana.

The vessels had not gone far when the lookout reported a large fleet on the horizon.

"Ten Spanish merchants," Lafitte was informed, "with a frigate convoy."

Here was a new problem—one of which Lafitte had kept his men in ignorance. With characteristic fairness, he called his ships together.

"We are faced by a superior force," he said. "The odds are against us. Shall we fight—or run?"

The men, eager for the rich spoils a victory promised, went into eager consultation. They appointed one Theodore Rawlins to carry their decision to Lafitte.

"We will fight," said Rawlins.

So Lafitte told him of the danger which the men had not suspected.

"We cannot claim to represent the Republic of Texas. Our letters of marque from the Republic of Venezuela are no longer in force. We have no standing in law. If we attack and lose, we shall be taken captive as pirates. . . . Do the men still wish to fight?"

The three crews heard the news in stunned surprise. Some urged attack, regardless of this new peril. But a number of the men went from amazement to sullen anger. Privateering with proper licenses was one thing. But piracy was another. Two scores of the men declared they would not be parties to an attack.

So Lafitte's force suffered another defection. After long consultation, while the fleet of merchantmen sailed to safety, Lafitte agreed to give the rebels one of the three boats, the *General Victoria.* They sailed for New Orleans, there to tell their story and to be forgiven because they had refused to become pirates.

From that day Lafitte's power waned rapidly. In 1822 he visited Charleston for supplies, but his visit convinced him that he had no friends left. Gulf ports buzzed with stories of piratical assaults on vessels off the coasts of Cuba: one rumor had it that Lafitte was held briefly in a Cuban prison, to be released by loyal friends for whom he had once done a kindness.

Most of his time he spent along the Mexican coast. He set up a shambling colony on Mugeres Island, off the coast of Yucatan. His last remaining lieutenant of his prosperous days, William Cochrane, was taken captive during a fight with two Spanish men-of-war, to spend long months in prison before he was released to become a commander in the Mexican navy.

Privateering in those years had turned into a losing game. Spanish and American naval strength in the Gulf was affording better protection. Traders, when they followed the Gulf's merchant lanes, often sailed with convoys. Lafitte men who, separated from their leader at Galveston, tried piracy on their own account were quickly captured or frightened into other pursuits.

The one-time "terror of the Gulf" became a petty buccaneer. He had to content himself with trifling raids on coast towns, with unimportant captures of coastal traders. His impressive power of only a few years before became a distant shadow. His name was no longer on the lips of all New Orleans, no longer a name to be uttered with wrath and fear by sea captains of the New World.

His base was that shabby collection of huts on Mugeres Island. There the scattered Mexican and Indian fishermen came to know him not as a devil of the sea, but as a silent, stern man who could be friend as well as enemy. Once he and his men, seeking food, seized a live bull when the governor of a seacoast Indian village refused to sell them meat. Natives came to Lafitte to say that the bull had been intended as the chief entertainment of a bull fight at a local festival; he at once ordered its return to them.

"Your life is harder than mine," he said. "It shall not be said that Jean Lafitte deprived you of a little pleasure."

So passed 1824 and 1825. Lafitte was cut off from friends, from luxury, from power. His brother Pierre he never saw again. The world which had cheered and feared him, if it thought of him at all, knew him merely as an unimportant chieftain of an unimportant colony far from the land he called his own.

In 1826 Jean Lafitte went from his Mugeres home to Teljas, a tiny village on the nearby mainland. He contracted a fever. His years in the tropics had eaten away his strength, and his desire to live had ebbed. . . . After a few days' illness in a flimsy native hut he died.

Some of his men, with the aid of an old Indian turtle fisherman, buried him there. Over his grave they raised a little mound of stones. The dwindling crew on Mugeres Island sailed away, and the next Gulf hurricane swept away every remnant of the village.

Jean Lafitte, toast of the cafés of New Orleans and "savior of Louisiana" only twelve years before, passed into legend a forgotten outcast. He had dreamed of empire. Yet his memory endured hardly longer than his life . . . his hopes and deeds erected for him only a makeshift monument in Mexico.